



# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**THE CHALLENGES TO GENDER INTEGRATION  
IN THE CAREER FIRE SERVICES: A COMPARATIVE  
CASE STUDY OF MEN IN NURSING**

by

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March 2017

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY</b> (Leave blank)		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> March 2017		<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> THE CHALLENGES TO GENDER INTEGRATION IN THE CAREER FIRE SERVICES: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF MEN IN NURSING				<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Anna L. Schermerhorn-Collins				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A				<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB number ____N/A____.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.				<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  Many career fire departments in the United States are struggling to promote greater workplace diversity. In particular, the successful recruitment and retention of women in the fire service remains elusive. The challenges to gender integration are rooted in both organizational and societal constructs. This thesis explores the challenges to gender integration in career fire services by conducting a comparative case study of men in nursing. Research is based in academic and historical accounts, in addition to the use of participant-observation methodology.  This thesis uses the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition to analyze the challenges to gender integration in the workplace. It starts with an overview of fire service culture. This overview is followed by a detailed analysis of women in fire service and men in nursing. Finally, the thesis compares the elements within each subcategory to identify the impact of various impediments to promoting recruitment and retention in gendered workspaces. The thesis concludes that the successful integration of women into the fire services will remain a slow process based on societal and organizational impediments, including some factors irrelevant of gender.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> gender, firefighting, women, nursing, diversity, organizational culture				<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 99
				<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified		<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified		<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified
				<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU

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IN THE CAREER FIRE SERVICES: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF MEN  
IN NURSING**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Many career fire departments in the United States are struggling to promote greater workplace diversity. In particular, the successful recruitment and retention of women in the fire service remains elusive. The challenges to gender integration are rooted in both organizational and societal constructs. This thesis explores the challenges to gender integration in career fire services by conducting a comparative case study of men in nursing. Research is based in academic and historical accounts, in addition to the use of participant-observation methodology.

This thesis uses the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition to analyze the challenges to gender integration in the workplace. It starts with an overview of fire service culture. This overview is followed by a detailed analysis of women in fire service and men in nursing. Finally, the thesis compares the elements within each subcategory to identify the impact of various impediments to promoting recruitment and retention in gendered workspaces. The thesis concludes that the successful integration of women into the fire services will remain a slow process based on societal and organizational impediments, including some factors irrelevant of gender.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

FDNY	Fire Department City of New York
OB/GYN	Obstetrics/Gynecology
OR	Operating Room
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
RN	Registered Nurse
UWF	United Women Firefighters

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Many career fire departments in the United States are struggling to promote greater workplace diversity. Whether facing impending legal action or under existing judicial orders, fire departments have been scrutinized over low percentages of women and people of color in the workforce. In response, fire departments are investing in recruitment and retention strategies that often fail to meet desired goals.

In particular, the successful recruitment and retention of women remains elusive for many career fire departments. In 1974, the first career woman firefighter in the United States was hired by the Arlington County Fire Department in Virginia, according to the International Association of Women in Fire and Emergency Services. More than 40 years later in 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that women comprised less than 4 percent of the career firefighting workforce nationwide. I propose that the reasons for the poor integration of women into firefighting include a combination of gender-related organizational and societal constructs in addition to the dynamics of workforce supply and demand that are independent of gender.

This thesis explores the challenges to gender integration in career fire services through a comparative case study of men in nursing. Similar to firefighting, nursing is a gendered helping profession. However, according to 2013 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of men in nursing has been gradually increasing—unlike women in firefighting. The juxtaposition of genders in this comparison provides a means for unraveling the various factors related to gender that impede integration in the workplace.

This research is based on academic and historical accounts from the time of women's entrance to fire service to the present day. These accounts appear in studies from the career fire services in the United States, Canada, and Australia. This thesis does not focus on any particular department, as the experiences of women firefighters transcend municipal boundaries. The author also has the privilege of applying participant-observation methodology based on more than 20 years of experience in career fire service.

The subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition are used to define the workplace cultures of firefighting and nursing and to analyze the challenges to gender integration in the workplace. An overview of fire service culture provides the background for the gender analysis to follow. The culture of fire service is defined by descriptions of firefighter qualifications and attributes, the brotherhood, pride as characterized by honor and shame, the making of a firefighter, and tradition of fire service. This overview is followed by a detailed analysis of how women firefighters fit into these subcategories by asking if women meet the qualifications for firefighting, whether there is room for sisters in the brotherhood, the degree of pride women feel in being a firefighter, what challenges are faced in the making of a woman firefighter, and how women fit into an enduring tradition that is built on men. Finally, a comparative case study of men in nursing asks whether men have the aptitudes desired of nurses, in what ways men in nursing experience exclusion, whether pride in profession is impacted by gender role strain, how the development of men in nursing is supported, and how men's contributions in the history of nursing may reframe traditional views of nursing.

The elements within each subcategory were compared to identify the impact of various impediments to promoting integration in gendered workspaces. The findings indicate that the number of jobs available in relation to the overall size of the workforce directly impacts the rate of demographic change in a profession. Regardless of gender, demographic change in the workforce is a slow and lengthy process in municipalities with a limited number of available firefighting jobs. In 2013, The Rand Corporation proposed that non-traditional firefighter applicants in Los Angeles suffered from disparate impact due in part to an applicant pool for firefighter that far exceeded hiring capacity. In contrast, in 2014 the American Association of Colleges of Nursing expected that the projected nursing shortage would demand that the nursing profession expand its capacity and labor pool.

Sense of belonging in the gendered professions of firefighting and nursing is facilitated through the establishment of mutual trust, the use of gender-neutral language, and the provision of equal workspace accommodation. Disparate conditions impact both women firefighters and men in nursing, as evidenced in the 2008 National Report Card in

Women in Firefighting by Denise Hulett, et al., as well as the nursing student experiences shared by Robert J. Meadus and J. Creina Twomey in 2011, among others.

Degree of pride in profession may vary considerably between women firefighters and men in nursing. Women firefighters generally maintain a high degree of pride in profession which can be harvested as a positive recruitment tool, whereas gender role strain negatively impacts the degree of pride associated with men in nursing as illustrated in Timothy McMurry's 2011 account of male nurse imagery and job mobility.

Mentorship is a vital relationship in firefighting and takes the form of the senior firefighter grooming the newcomer. Mentorship is particularly valuable for the woman firefighter as she seeks acceptance and learns how to navigate through often unfamiliar customs of fire service. While studies by Joshua S. Smith in 2006 and Susan A. LaRocco in 2007 each identified a lack of male mentorship for men in nursing, the nursing students in these studies did not feel that the lack of mentorship inhibited their success in nursing.

Finally, the short history of women in firefighting limits the evidence of women's contributions to firefighting, unlike the historical contributions of men to nursing which provide a means for situating men in the profession. The adherence to tradition and a culture that is resistant to change appear more stringent in firefighting than nursing, suggesting that women firefighters often end up adapting to the existing culture rather than the culture adapting to them.

This author concludes that the successful integration of women into the fire services will remain a slow process amid societal and organizational impediments, including some factors independent of gender. Increasing the percentage of eligible women firefighter candidates is dependent on targeted recruitment and specialized training programs which accentuate the pride of being a woman firefighter. Mentorship and the establishment of trust by respected senior firefighters are some of the most effective means for facilitating acceptance and sense of belonging for sisters into the brotherhood. However, any statistical increase of women in the fire service will remain gradual as long as the pool of eligible candidates greatly exceeds the demand for firefighters.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of the Fire Department of the City of New York who supported me through the intense curriculum at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security; the members of the Center for Terrorism and Disaster Preparedness who encouraged me to apply to the program and provided reassurance when I felt that I may be in over my head; and the members of Engine 93, Ladder 45, and Battalion 13 who witnessed first-hand my all-night study sessions at the firehouse and provided much-needed humor when my mood was less than cheerful over lack of sleep and looming deadlines.

A special thanks to my thesis advisors, Carolyn Halladay and Kathleen Kiernan, who kept giving me that extra push to question, revise, and question again. Thank you for challenging me and providing an environment that enabled me to confront difficult subject matter and incorporate personal experiences into my analysis. To Anders Strindberg and David Brannan, thank you for introducing a means for analyzing groups built on strong cultural foundations. To my cohorts of 1505/1506, thank you for broadening my worldview. I learned from each and every one of you.

To Michele Fitzsimmons and Sharon Eberhardt, thank you for providing feedback on my chapter drafts. Your insider/outsider points of view were invaluable. To Janet Ackerson, thank you for your diligent review of this thesis when I could no longer see straight.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Kenneth Collins, for indulging me in this journey. Thank you for your understanding during my struggles. Thank you for always being there.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

I have served as a career firefighter and fire officer for over 20 years. When I joined the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) in 1996, I was only the second woman hired after the original group of women firefighters appointed following a court decree in the early 1980s. I consider myself lucky that there were women firefighters before me, knowing that my passage in the fire service was smoother because their experiences. I became involved with the women firefighter's association in my department at the recommendation of a male fire chief who was in command of the fire academy at the time of my training. Through early involvement with the women's organization in my first nine years as a firefighter, I directed a physical training program for women firefighter recruits. After nine years of firefighting, I was promoted to fire lieutenant. I had the opportunity to meet influential women in fire service in the United States by attending several national women's firefighting conferences as both a firefighter and fire officer. I was inspired by a conference workshop about firefighting camps for young women and in 2007 as a fire lieutenant working in collaboration with the Fire Service Women of New York State, I cofounded a firefighting summer camp for young women in Utica, New York, which I directed for seven years.

Over the course of my career, I have seen the number of women in my department fall due to retirements and slowly rise again, but never has the percentage of women substantially increased despite years of recruitment efforts. While the conditions for women in fire service have improved considerably based on experiences shared by the first women firefighters, there are still challenges that exist for many women today. Fire departments around the country continue to face charges of discrimination and sexual harassment as evidenced in fire law blogs.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to recruit and retain women fail to meet desired goals.<sup>2</sup> Teenage girls with aspirations to become career firefighters see

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<sup>1</sup> "Fire Law Blog," accessed January 14, 2017, [www.firelawblog.com/tag/sex-discrimination/](http://www.firelawblog.com/tag/sex-discrimination/).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Flynn, "Despite Recruiting, Few Women Do Well in Firefighter Tests," *New York Times*, February 3, 2000, B1.

those dreams fade away as limited fire service opportunities and adulthood sets in.<sup>3</sup> Despite the 40-year history of women firefighters in career fire service in the United States, the solution to successful gender integration in firefighting remains ever elusive.

The low number of women in fire service has been attributed to numerous impediments. Stereotypes about women firefighters include: the beliefs that women lack the physical strength to be a firefighter or panic in stressful situations; that most women are not interested in the dangerous and dirty work of firefighting; that most women firefighters are lesbians thereby discouraging heterosexual women from applying; and that most women firefighters just want to hang out in firehouses but not really go to fires. Inequities that women firefighters often face are the lack of privacy in the workplace, specifically in terms of bathrooms, changing areas, and dormitories. Women firefighters are also often plagued by ill-fitting gear and are forced to adapt to equipment designed to male specifications. Marginalization of women firefighters includes the use of gendered language, which speaks proudly of firemen and the brotherhood but renders women invisible. Many women firefighters have also experienced exclusion in the social organization of fire service through shunning and isolation by their peers. However, the precise impact that these impediments play in the recruitment and retention of women in fire service remains unclear.

## **B. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The integration of women into the fire service has only been met with marginal success. The first women to enter career fire service in the United States were hired in the mid-1970s when many departments were under consent decree to remedy discriminatory hiring practices.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 40 years later, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women firefighters made up less than 4 percent of career firefighters in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Over 100 teenage girls attended Phoenix Firecamp of the Fire Service Women of New York State from 2007–2013 when I was director. While some former campers are volunteer firefighters, none have attained career status as of this writing. One former camper is currently on the list for hire in a career department in New York State.

<sup>4</sup> Linda F. Willing, *On the Line: Women Firefighters Tell Their Stories* (Grand Lake, CO: JTD Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>

The physical demands of firefighting and an occupational culture steeped in tradition and masculine bravado are often cited as prevailing reasons why the fire service has been slow to hire more women. The same factors could be cited as impediments for women in other non-traditional fields such as law enforcement and the military, and yet the percentage of women in firefighting is markedly lower than comparable professions.<sup>6</sup> Even the field of nursing, where men face sociocultural challenges inherent to working in a gendered profession, has made greater strides at gender diversification.<sup>7</sup> By these accounts, firefighting remains one of the dominant gendered occupations.

Failure to diversify has placed fire departments across the United States under increased scrutiny and has resulted in sex discrimination lawsuits against various career fire departments within recent years.<sup>8</sup> This scrutiny, along with municipalities' concern about and response to lawsuits, often results in targeted recruitment efforts as well as revisions in hiring standards and practices. These organizational policy changes are frequently criticized by members of the fire service and the public as unfair and indicative of a lowering of standards.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, these remedies are typically met with limited success.

The FDNY is a force of approximately 10,600 uniformed firefighters and fire officers, and yet less than 60 are women despite decades of organized recruitment efforts.<sup>10</sup> Targeted recruitment that focuses on gender will only succeed when it attracts candidates who are capable of meeting the requirements established by the specific fire service agency and are driven to become firefighters despite the masculinized culture of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Donna M. Sayman, Fighting the Trauma Demons: What Men in Nursing Want You to Know,” *Nursing Forum* 50, no. 1 (2015): 9.

<sup>8</sup> Chicago Settles Sex Discrimination Suit Over Abilities Test – Fire Law Blog, [www.firelawblog.com/.../chicago-settles-discrimination-suit-over-abilities-test/](http://www.firelawblog.com/.../chicago-settles-discrimination-suit-over-abilities-test/) (2013); City is paying heavily for LAFD bias suits, [www.latimes.com/local/.../la-me-adv-fire-lawsuits-20150504-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/.../la-me-adv-fire-lawsuits-20150504-story.html) (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Denise M. Hulett et al., *A National Report Card on Women in Firefighting*. Madison, WI: International Association of Women in Fire & Emergency Services (2008), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Aidan McLaughlin and Ginger Adams Otis, “FDNY Welcomes Three More Women to its Ranks,” *New York Daily News*, May 3, 2016, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/fdny-welcomes-women-ranks-article-1.2623738>.

fire service. Without a substantial pool of qualified women candidates, revisions in hiring standards and practices do little to increase the overall percentage of women in fire services.

Impediments faced by women in firefighting include practices and policies over which fire departments have control as well as perceptions of firefighting that are beyond the scope of any one department and of fire service in general. For example, fire departments can offer training programs that create equal opportunities for recruits and incumbents, outfit all of its firefighters with proper fitting gear, provide separate facilities to ensure privacy, and hold members accountable in the event of workplace harassment and discrimination.

More difficult for fire service agencies to overcome are the limited availability of firefighting jobs and societal perceptions of firefighters and firefighting, including the classic image of a brawny hero. Along with the rugged fireman stereotype, the limited visibility of women firefighters contributes to the sentiment that firefighting is simply not a job for women. Public attention to gender-based lawsuits and media stories that suggest differential hiring for women also fuel the perception that women are not suited for firefighting. These impediments and perceptions, in addition to the minimal success of past recruitment and retention strategies, raise the question as to how positive gender integration in the fire service can be achieved.

### **C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This thesis seeks to evaluate the challenges faced by women in firefighting by asking how the impediments to gender integration may be effectively minimized in career fire service. Ancillary questions include: what factors of organizational culture impede the integration of women in fire service; what societal factors beyond fire service culture inhibit gender integration; why existing recruitment and retention strategies are frequently met with marginal success; and which strategies are most realistic and productive for improving gender integration in the fire service?

## **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review synthesizes information relevant to fire service culture and gender integration. Literature sources include journal articles, theses, reports, and books that analyze the issues of gender and organizational culture within the fire service. This section begins with an overview of fire service culture and its resistance to change and is concluded by a brief history of past gender integration challenges.

### **1. Fire Service Culture and the Resistance to Change**

In 1991, anthropologist Miriam Kaprow proposed that fire service culture in New York City was changing. The social organization of the firehouse was reflective of the firmly held belief that firefighting was not simply a job, but a calling. However, Kaprow hypothesized that workplace autonomy and longstanding values of heroism and sacrifice were being threatened by regulatory oversight and court mandates.<sup>11</sup> While Kaprow did not identify a primary reason for the amplified oversight, her argument followed on the heels of increased Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and the court-ordered hiring of the first FDNY women firefighters in the early 1980s. In 1987 when Sheila Akabas led a team of social workers to examine FDNY workplace culture, Akabas argued that firefighters exhibited a sense of hereditary entitlement to the rights and privileges of fire service and that bureaucratic control would be necessary to facilitate change.<sup>12</sup> In a thesis by Cathy Boggs, California firefighters in the late 1990s expressed fear that fire service camaraderie and the firefighting way of life would be at risk and that the social status afforded to firefighters was being devalued by the oversight provided by affirmative action policies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Miriam Kaprow, "Magical Work: Firefighters in New York," *Human Organization* 50, no. 1 (1991): 100.

<sup>12</sup> Sheila H. Akabas, "Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration: A Tale of Minor Success and Major Woes as Organizational Change Meets a Culture of Resistance," *Reflections* (Spring 2010): 83.

<sup>13</sup> Cathy Boggs, "Equal Employment Opportunity, Communication Accommodation Climate and the Gender Structuration of Organizations: Development and Test of a Model for Understanding the Dynamics of Male Resistance to Workplace Gender Integration" (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1998): 133–137.

In his 2012 thesis, Seattle Fire Department Battalion Chief Alan Thomas Cox challenged the proposition that oversight and regulation would be effective in promoting cultural change in the fire service. Cox described the fire service as resistant to change where cultural indoctrination is the norm and independent thought is not encouraged.<sup>14</sup> Taking a step further, in his history of the FDNY, Terry Golway claimed that firefighters tended not to like people of authority who were viewed as being outside of the in-group.<sup>15</sup> Good leadership, in the minds of firefighters, occurred when management was considered part of the team. The symbiotic relationship between firefighters and their officers ensured that the workforce plays a vital role in the preservation of fire service culture. In the 2010 National Report Card on Women in Firefighting, Denise Hulett et al. identified additional resistance to fire service cultural change in the forms of strong personal relationships and the longevity of employees, rewards of employment, and pride in tradition.<sup>16</sup> All of these factors serve to reinforce the existing belief system that is embedded in fire service culture.

In her study about the masculinities of care within the Toronto Fire Services, Susan Braedley addressed how traditional firefighters valued the brotherhood of the fire service for creating a sense of belonging that also served the function of teaching new members the ways and tradition of fire service.<sup>17</sup> Rather than promoting differences, it was expected that the newcomer would adapt to the existing customs, thereby reinforcing the resiliency of fire service culture. Carol Chetkovich, who focused on issues of gender and race in the Oakland Fire Service in the mid-1990s, acknowledged the resilience of the communal identity of fire service. Although presenting challenges for women and people of color who are not traditional members of the fire service, Chetkovich also argued that fire service culture served legitimate functions and that it would be inadvisable to attempt to dismantle a culture that has many positive aspects. Ultimately,

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<sup>14</sup> Alan Thomas Cox, "The Significance of Fire Service Culture as an Impediment to Effective Leadership in the Homeland Security Environment." (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Golway, *So Others Might Live: A History of New York's Bravest: The FDNY from 1700 to the Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 207.

<sup>16</sup> Hulett, et al., *A National Report Card*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Braedley, "Emergencies of Care: Masculinities and Neoliberalism at Work" (PhD diss., York University, 2009), 250.



Chetkovich did suggest that cultural change may occur over time with the influx of non-traditional personnel and evolving work responsibilities.<sup>18</sup>

## **2. Gender Integration and the Fire Service**

Social acceptance for women firefighters was lacking after the 1982 court ordered appointment of the first women firefighters in New York City. Akabas proposed that after benefiting from a court order which mandated their hiring, the first FDNY women forever carried the stigma of not having earned the job the “right way,” according to the opinion of their male peers.<sup>19</sup> A decade later, Boggs wrote of the ‘outright hostility’ displayed by California male firefighters over altered hiring practices designed to increase the number of women firefighters.<sup>20</sup> Following the 2003 Kelowna British Columbia wildfire, Shelly Pacholok asked male firefighters why they felt there were so few women in the fire service. The men cited physiological differences between the sexes, the challenge for women to fit in, and the presumed difficulty for women to handle stressful situations.<sup>21</sup>

According to Chetkovich, women firefighters’ response to the gendered work environment was either to downplay gender differences and accept unfavorable customs or to actively challenge the existing masculinized culture.<sup>22</sup> More specifically, Boggs suggested that because many fire departments were ill-prepared for a mixed-gender workforce, women were often forced to adapt to the masculine culture and that morale issues would follow gender-based challenges to the existing culture.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of whether women firefighters choose to acquiesce or resist against gender differences, Hulett et al. argued that barriers to women’s inclusion in fire service

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<sup>18</sup> Carol A. Chetkovich, *Real Heat: Gender and Race in the Urban Fire Service* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 182–183.

<sup>19</sup> Akabas, “Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration,” 80.

<sup>20</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 127.

<sup>21</sup> Shelley Pacholok, *Into the Fire: Disaster and the Remaking of Gender*. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 37–42.

<sup>22</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 129.

continue to exist in terms of both physical and psychological space.<sup>24</sup> Hulett et al. also claimed that women who entered the fire service challenged the self-esteem of male firefighters for whom firefighting was limited to the few “who had the right stuff.”<sup>25</sup> In this regard the entry of women into fire service has been viewed as a threat to the core values of firefighting.

Linda Willing, whose career as a firefighter began in Colorado in 1980, saw modest signs of progress for women firefighters over the course of her career. For Willing, the pivotal moment when women’s progress halted was after September 11, 2001 when women firefighters seemed to disappear from public view.<sup>26</sup> The iconic masculine image of the firefighter was reclaimed and it was once again fireman not firefighter.

Rather than viewing the fire service as solely responsible for gender disparity within the profession, Chetkovich argued that the fire service is to some degree reflective of gender constructs within society, albeit exaggerated.<sup>27</sup> Chetkovich described the fire service as a vocation where “men must prove they can be firefighters; women must prove they can—in some sense—be men.”<sup>28</sup> Tamika Perrott found that the women firefighters in her Australian-based study were less interested in dismantling general stereotypes about women’s abilities as firefighters as they were about proving themselves as exceptional compared to other women and therefore deserving of the role of firefighter.<sup>29</sup>

## **E. METHODOLOGY**

To analyze how the impediments to gender integration in the fire service can be minimized, patterns and divergences between two helping professions will be researched

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<sup>24</sup> Hulett, et al., *A National Report Card*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Willing, *On the Line*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Tamika Perrott, “Beyond ‘Token’ Firefighters: Exploring Women’s Experiences of Gender and Identity at Work,” *Sociological Research Online* 21, no. 1 (2016), accessed October 24, 2016. doi: 10.5153/sro.3832.

by exercising a comparative case study of women in firefighting and men in nursing. Instrumentation will include academic research and historical accounts. Participant observation methodology based on my 20-year experience as a firefighter and fire officer in the FDNY.

This thesis will start with a descriptive background to the organizational culture of career fire service. I will break down the organizational culture into subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition as I review the impediments women firefighters commonly encounter. An analysis of the impediments faced by men in nursing will follow for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences to gender integration as experienced by nontraditional employees in helping professions. A comparative analysis of the gender disparities between the two professions will help to shed light on whether the impediments for gender integration in the fire service are embedded internally in organizational culture or if they are a symptom of external societal factors that are beyond organizational control. Key points and recommendations will conclude this study.

This study is not about a specific policy, individual, or a specific organization in spite of the author's personal experiences within the FDNY. This study is not a history of women in the fire service. This analysis relies on both historical and contemporary issues in career firefighting, many of which may have persisted throughout the history of women in career fire service.

I look to identify ways in which impediments to gender integration remain and ways in which they have been best overcome by painting a broader landscape through the use of a comparative case study. Elucidating the roles that organization and society play as the source of hindrances to gender integration will have value in determining the successes of existing and future recruitment and retention programs. It is intended that the findings will lead to policy recommendations with realistic and attainable goals for supporting a mixed gender workforce within the fire service.

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## II. FIRE SERVICE CULTURE

The fire service has a distinctive workplace culture. Entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition are equally reflective of the fire service in New York City as they are the fire service in Oakland, California or Toronto, Canada. At my own firehouse kitchen table, it has often been said that inside every firehouse is the same cast of characters just a different set of faces—all products of this same dominant workplace culture. Strong beliefs regarding who is entitled to be a firefighter, the concept of brotherhood, pride, firefighter indoctrination and mentorship, and the value of tradition help explain why this culture continues to endure with little variation regardless of place or time. This chapter examines each of these aspects of the fire service culture to draw a picture of the landscape in which firefighters work and live.

### A. ENTITLEMENT—WHO DESERVES TO BE A FIREFIGHTER?

The message was that firefighting is a special calling, a role that involves competitive selection and rigorous preparation.<sup>30</sup>

The allure of exciting work, the benefits of civil service employment, and strong tradition make career firefighting a desirable profession for many. This vast appeal also means that firefighting jobs are not easy to come by. In her 1991 analysis of New York City firefighters, Kaprow proposed:

The excitement of the work, the high success rate of extinguishing fires and saving lives, the overseeing of the whole product, the good salaries and, above all, the relative absence of proletarianization—would seem to explain why there are long waiting lists for those who have passed the grueling admission exams to the FDNY.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Kaprow, “Magical Work,” 100.

Decades later, the conditions Kaprow described remain, and the long lists for hire endure. New York City rarely exhausts a list of eligible candidates for firefighter. Typically, thousands of candidates are not summoned by the time the list is expired.<sup>32</sup>

This phenomenon is not unique to New York City. The Toronto Fire Services maintains an operational workforce of approximately 2,700 firefighters with an annual attrition rate of just 3 percent.<sup>33</sup> In 2012, 2,408 applications to Toronto Fire Services were filed.<sup>34</sup> While precise numbers are unavailable, if hiring is based on attrition, the attrition rate alone would only amount to approximately 80 vacancies to be filled annually. Based on such limited turnover, new hires are a small percentage of the overall workforce. Unless the rate of hires increases significantly, it will take years to change the face of the department.

In consideration of the low attrition rates in many urban fire departments, there are typically more job applicants than there are firefighting positions available. Large numbers of applicants and low attritions rates result in great competition for a limited number of firefighting jobs. Ultimately, it is up to the municipality to determine a means for identifying and selecting those candidates who are most deserving of the limited number of positions available.

Depending on the municipality, there are often many steps in the qualification process for firefighter. These steps may include, but are not limited to, a written and physical examination, medical and psychological clearances, background investigation, and interview. Such parameters as residency requirements, former military service, educational qualifications, prior training, and family legacy may also factor into the hiring process. For those unfamiliar with the hiring mechanism, the process can be

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<sup>32</sup> The most recent exception was Exam No. 7029 which was first administered in 1999. Due to the vacancies created by the large number of deaths and retirements following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, all eligible candidates on the 7000+ numbered list should have received notice for hire.

<sup>33</sup> “Staff report for action on Toronto Fire Services Diversity,” TFS path to diversity background file – 59656.pdf – Adobe Acrobat Reader DC (June 17, 2013), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Cain, “Investigation: Slowly, Toronto firefighters become more diverse,” *Global News*, March 17, 2015, accessed August 26, 2016, <http://globalnews.ca/news/1872085/slowly-toronto-firefighters-become-more-diverse/>.

daunting. Applicants with prior knowledge of the hiring process, such as family tradition or neighborhood ties to fire service, find the process easier to navigate.

Golway illustrated the perpetuation of firefighting ranks along existing ties against the backdrop of the 1970s recession years in New York City:

In some neighborhoods in the outer boroughs and the nearby suburbs, civil service exams were as much a ritual of young adulthood as senior proms and flashy cars. The fireman's test determined whether a son would follow in his father's footsteps or be forced to look elsewhere – a dim prospect in the economically battered 1970s, as the New York region suffered not only from oil shocks but the beginnings of massive blue-collar job losses. The test could ensure a young man of a quarter century of protection from recession and unemployment – assuming, of course, that the fiscal crisis of the 1970s was never repeated.<sup>35</sup>

As described by Golway, the process of becoming a firefighter was seemingly organic, at least in specific communities. Firefighting families were defined by generations where sons became firefighters like their fathers before them. The familial trend in firefighting was generally not viewed as special treatment or nepotism by traditional firefighters because in theory, all any firefighting applicant had to do to qualify was to pass a merit-based civil service test. This line of thinking overlooked how those with prior fire service knowledge stood to benefit.

Non-traditional firefighting communities including women and people of color showed interest in joining firefighting ranks; however, the rank and file was concerned and disdainful, believing that special treatment would be granted in order to insure their hiring.<sup>36</sup> Pacholok identified this concern as expressed by firefighters involved in the 2003 Kelowna, British Columbia wildfire: “Many maintained that women were welcome in their occupation as long as they did not receive any special treatment in the hiring process; the competition for jobs must be played on a ‘level playing field.’”<sup>37</sup> This

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<sup>35</sup> Golway, *So Others Might Live*, 261.

<sup>36</sup> Arguing that standards were lowered in order to admit women firefighters to the FDNY in 1982, editorials and letters to the editor of the New York Daily News expressed the fear that lives and property were in danger by unqualified women firefighters, some of whom were rumored just to want make a name for themselves. In: [www.laborarts.org/exhibits/womenfirefighters/1982-87.cfm#](http://www.laborarts.org/exhibits/womenfirefighters/1982-87.cfm#).

<sup>37</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 47.

sentiment still holds today as firefighters respond to discrimination lawsuits levied against their agencies.<sup>38</sup> A firefighter is felt by many to be deserving of his or her position only if it is attained through the same means as everyone else with no set-asides or special requirements.

The problem arises when municipalities, looking to promote gender integration in their fire departments, run up against the fear that compromises will be made and less deserving applicants will be accepted to meet political agendas. Proposed remedies often include revised testing procedures and the changing of standards. The modification of hiring practices for the purpose of promoting diversity breeds resentment among the rank and file membership. Distrust and anger are the reactions that Boggs identified in the late 1990s in one California fire department:

Responses to the new testing system from already-employed firefighters has [*sic*] ranged from skepticism to outright hostility, according to fire department officials. Firefighters have criticized the new testing standards as unfair to qualified male applicants, and they have questioned whether the new female recruits are able to meet the physical requirements of the job.<sup>39</sup>

It is not uncommon for concerns over safety compromises to both firefighting crews and the public to follow as stories play out in local media.<sup>40</sup>

This discourse loops back to the question of who should be a firefighter, at least in general terms. In theory, the selection process for firefighter recruits optimally reflects a standard measure of who has what it takes to be a successful firefighter. Chetkovich wrote: “In traditional fire departments, physical size, strength, and prowess are highly valued; courage, toughness, and aggressiveness have become the hallmarks of a good firefighter.”<sup>41</sup> These qualifications and standards are primarily viewed as inherently

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<sup>38</sup> Backlash against the ruling by Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis in the *United States and Vulcan Society v. City of New York* was most evident by the persistence of the now defunct *Merit Matters*, an anti-affirmative action group, which challenged the court ruling through written word, speech, and direct action.

<sup>39</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 128.

<sup>40</sup> The New York Post ran a series of exclusive articles from 2013 to 2015 about FDNY women firefighter recruits who failed to meet specific academy qualifications, generating public and professional discord on the issue.

<sup>41</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 18.



masculine and make firefighting an unlikely place for women. As long as masculine traits are most valued in defining who is deserving of firefighting jobs, women will struggle to attain a respected place in firefighting. Chetkovich argued that this dynamic is reflective of societal constructions of gender as opposed to simply being a construct of firefighting culture.<sup>42</sup> It does not inherently deem women unsuitable as firefighters.

Historically, certain traits and behaviors may have been considered desirable even though they had no direct correlation to firefighting skills and abilities. Braedley related the following conversation with Toronto firefighters: “As one group of firefighters told me with some humour [*sic*], in the 1980s, ‘all you needed to become a firefighter was a pulse and the ability to play hockey, ‘cause when I got hired it was for the good ol’ boy’s club. White males.’”<sup>43</sup> In this dated narrative, recruiting firefighters based on sports prowess and the ability to fit in reflected the arbitrary measures used to select wanted individuals regardless of firefighting ability.

## **B. BELONGING—THE “BROTHERHOOD”**

Firefighting is not viewed as simply a job. As a member of the fire service one is said to be part of a larger fire department family. Spending upwards of 24 hours on shift together, firefighters share dining, housekeeping responsibilities, and dormitories in between service obligations. Shared firehouse duties are integral in defining firefighting life.<sup>44</sup> The firehouse is not simply a utilitarian space; it is an environment which reinforces workplace culture. The firehouse promotes familial bonding and a sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging is akin to layers of an onion. Fire service, as a whole, is the onion. Peeling back the first layer reveals the municipal fire department of which one is a member, whether the FDNY, Toronto Fire Services, the Oakland Fire Department, or any one of a host of fire departments worldwide. Underlying the municipal layer is the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>43</sup> Braedley, “Emergencies of Care,” 207.

<sup>44</sup> Ellen Rosell, Kathy Miller and Karen Barber, “Firefighting Women and Sexual Harassment,” *Public Personnel Management* 24, no.3 (1995): 339.

specific fire company or firehouse to which a firefighter is assigned within a department. At the center is the position that a firefighter holds within the fire company in relation to his or her peers.

Whether referring to an individual fire company, fire department, or to fire service as a whole, firefighters identify with being part of a brotherhood. The most striking example of brotherhood is when a fire department suffers a tragedy. Firefighters from agencies outside of the host department travel great lengths to provide support and share in mourning. The brotherhood is essential in defining a firefighter's sense of belonging:

Brotherhoods are important to individual men, and groups of men, because they teach, confer and confirm particular ways to be masculine in ways that provide a sense of belonging. My findings suggest that firefighters receive a psychological wage from their occupationally-based homosocial relations; one that confers an honourable [*sic*] masculinity, belonging and care. This homosociality among firefighters is the very essence of their "brotherhood."<sup>45</sup>

In Braedley's assessment, such social bonds as male friendship and mentorship are the lifeblood of the brotherhood.

By its very definition, the term "brotherhood" does not establish inclusivity and a sense of belonging for all. A brotherhood has very specific membership, after all. Chetkovich points out that: "It should be readily apparent that if a positive function of a firefighter culture is to create solidarity, a negative function may be the exclusion of those who 'do not belong.'"<sup>46</sup> When Akabas led a team of social workers and social scientists tasked with tackling the problems associated with gender integration in the FDNY, she made a similar assessment. "We realized that the strong culture within the department was a positive in that it shields and nurtures most of its members, but it does so at the price of making entry difficult for groups that are different from the race, ethnicity, religion or gender of the majority."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Braedley, "Emergencies of Care," 84.

<sup>46</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Akabas, "Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration," 84.

A firefighter is challenged with becoming a valued member of the in-group when that individual does not represent the ideal or standards that a specific fire company upholds. For some, as described by Pacholok, simply fitting in is the most valued attribute in defining membership:

Kyle also went on to point out that finding a person who would fit in was even more important than the knowledge or skills because those could be taught on the job: “That’s the biggest thing, hey? You need someone that fits in. If you got a guy that didn’t score very well on the exam, that doesn’t matter as much as he’s able to fit in with the guys, because you’ll be able to teach them on the job.”<sup>48</sup>

In this example, in-group membership is synonymous with fitting in. Performance is not necessarily the prevailing standard by which firefighters are initially measured.

As the brotherhood of the fire service is a natural manifestation of a culture in which masculine traits are esteemed, firefighters who do not exhibit those characteristics are not only challenged by the environment, but may also present a challenge for the environment in return. Studies from the 1990s illustrate the environment of gender integration and the masculine-based culture of firefighting. Boggs made the following point: “Given the masculine nature of fire department culture, it is not surprising that gender-integration of fire crews frequently has been viewed as controversial and problematic both by fire department management and by male firefighters.”<sup>49</sup> This is not to say that women are unable to negotiate the fire service environment or even attain a sense of belonging. But it comes with challenges. Chetkovich explained:

Firefighters are expected to be large, strong, athletic, unemotional, cool, good with tools, physically hard-working, brave, aggressive, competitive in the manner of team sports, self-confident, and socially skilled in a loud, group-oriented environment. The genesis of this image could be argued at length, but its implications for gender segregation are clear: women will have a hard time becoming firefighters to the extent that to be a firefighter means to be a man.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 126.

<sup>50</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 37.

Early in my firefighting career, the idea that there was an inherent separation between men and women firefighters was reinforced to me in the late 1990s. Senior women firefighters in my department advised that while I could be part of the team, I would never be one of the “guys.” It is in this regard that the concept of brotherhood minimizes the role of women in firefighting. While the concept of “sisterhood” is slowly gaining acknowledgement and use in the fire service, complete inclusion of women is more often the exception than the rule.

### **C. PRIDE—HONOR AND SHAME**

Membership in the in-group is closely related to the values of honor and shame. In the fire service, this is manifested in the form of company pride. Fire companies have reputations. “Good” firehouses are busy companies that are known for catching a lot of fire duty and getting the work done. They are staffed with firefighters and fire officers who are reputed to be good at their jobs. These fire companies often have few vacancies and are difficult to get assigned to. Firefighters and fire officers guard the coveted reputation of their fire company even when fire duty declines or shifts out of their response area due to changing population demographics and new building codes.

Firefighters speak with pride when assigned to a good firehouse. In my first year as a probationary firefighter, I was assigned to a busy engine company in Brooklyn, New York. I was told that whenever anyone asked me where I worked that I should simply reply “the best company on the job.” It was self-evident to members of that firehouse that anyone in the FDNY would know which fire company I was speaking about. The reality is that firefighters in other “good” firehouses in the city felt exactly the same way about their companies.

Pride exists not just in belonging to a particular fire company, but in the experience of going to fires. Retired FDNY firefighter Dennis Smith illustrated how fire experience boosts a sense of pride for the individual firefighter: “Another benefit of being a firefighter is your sense of self-worth. You go out on a job, you eat some smoke, you take a little heat, and you get the great satisfaction of confronting the flames and

defeating them. You know you're doing a good job, and that's a very valuable benefit."<sup>51</sup>  
Even the occurrence of injury is an emblem of honor, as Smith elaborated:

The interesting thing is, you hardly mind getting hurt in a fire, as long as you don't get hurt too badly. A gash in your arm that takes twelve stitches, a burn on your neck, a broken wrist, or some injury like that is, in a sense, just another red badge of courage that reinforces the things you believe about firefighting and reinforces your confidence in yourself to do a tough, challenging, and dangerous job.<sup>52</sup>

I had seven years in the fire service when I received a burn at a three-alarm fire. The injury required that I spend ten days in the burn center. I could not count the number of visitors that I received from all firefighting ranks, including chief officers and firefighters with whom I had never worked before. Outside of 9/11, the support from my fire department colleagues following my injury was one of the greatest sources of pride and humility that I have felt in being a member of my profession.

But just as it takes years to build a good reputation, it may take only one moment to destroy it. In the relationship between the concepts of honor, shame, and group membership, it is apparent how the actions and character of an individual firefighter may impact the reputation of his or her company. While new firefighters are always under the microscope, non-traditional firefighters are often under greater scrutiny, as described in one of Smith's narratives:

With blacks, women, and Hispanics coming into the fire service, for some it's the first time a company has had a minority member or a female member. There is a lot of tension, and all sides have to learn to adjust to each other. What is really going to even it out in the end is how they do out on the street. How do they stand up to the test of being a firefighter?<sup>53</sup>

When a firefighter performs poorly at a fire, word often gets out. Not only is the reputation of this firefighter compromised, but the reputation of the fire company may also be at risk. The firefighter in Smith's narrative continued: "If they stand up and are

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<sup>51</sup> Dennis Smith, *Firefighters: Their Lives in Their Own Words* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1988), xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 139.

able to meet the test of the firefighter, they will earn acceptance the same as anybody else has earned acceptance. If they fail, the individual will never be accepted as a firefighter.”<sup>54</sup> When a firefighter “fails,” the fellow firefighters in that fire company will be forced to respond in an attempt to maintain or salvage the reputation of the fire company.

Company pride is not limited to the fire ground. Because firefighting life is structured around the firehouse and masculinized culture, honor and shame are also defined in interpretations of masculinity and femininity. Chetkovich identified these interpretations as a societal construct, not as a phenomenon that is unique to fire service: “It is not insignificant that both in the firehouse and on the urban street corner, what is at stake is one’s “manhood”—the greatest humiliation is in being *feminized*.”<sup>55</sup> There is honor in masculinity and shame in feminization. When I was a probationary firefighter in 1996, the firehouse that I was assigned to had a woman firefighter who had been there for 14 years. The presence of two women in a firehouse was unusual given the few number of women in the FDNY. Most firehouses did not have any women. Not long after my assignment to the company, I was told by other firefighters that the firehouse did not want to have the reputation of being known as the “dollhouse.”

In order to preserve masculinity, Chetkovich suggested that firehouse chores which might otherwise be deemed as feminine take on a masculine nature:

Housework is masculine because there is no “women’s work” in this setting. Even conventionally feminine skills such as cooking are masculinized: firehouse meals emphasize hearty, strong-flavored fare, in which there is little need or room for culinary refinements. To the extent that firehouse tasks are valued, then, they are firefighters’ (men’s) work.<sup>56</sup>

Unaware of this dynamic, it is no surprise that when I cooked Danish pancake balls for a holiday breakfast at the firehouse, I was chided by the other woman firefighter for doing such “girly things.” I had violated the masculine (and masculinized) code.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 97.

#### **D. INDOCTRINATION AND MENTORSHIP**

The fire service is structured by a rank hierarchy consisting of officers and firefighters. Fire officers command fire and emergency operations and oversee administrative duties. They are responsible for the supervision, training, and accountability of their troops. Unable to provide direct supervision over all operations during a fire or emergency, officers rely on their firefighters to accomplish expected tasks in the absence of direct orders. Kaprow described the functionality of this team: “Firefighters are, of course, clearly required to obey officers’ orders inside a working fire. But obedience in such a situation is more like the cooperation of a basketball team, a sailing crew, or a ballet corps, rather than the forced conformity of workers submitting to management.”<sup>57</sup> When accompanied by a crew of experienced firefighters, the fire officer often needs to give little direction. What appears as chaos is actually a well-orchestrated operation.

Shortly after acceptance into the recruit academy, new firefighters are taught to keep busy, to be seen but not heard, and to follow direction. Seattle Fire Battalion Chief Alan Cox described this dynamic as a “follow the leader” mentality ingrained early in the minds of young firefighters: “The fire service does not exactly encourage independent thought. From the time new firefighters enter drill school, they are encouraged to listen, to follow directions, and to perform in predictable, measureable manners.”<sup>58</sup> Under this paramilitary structure, authority is not questioned.

The real learning begins after the young firefighter walks into the firehouse with a baseline of skills acquired in the fire academy. It is in the firehouse where the novice firefighter is to absorb the teaching of senior firefighters by ascribing to the “follow the leader” mentality that was ingrained in the recruit academy. The new firefighter should not challenge the particular way that things are done.

Embedded within fire service social structure, the senior firefighter plays a critical role in mentoring new recruits. Chetkovich described the bartered relationship between

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<sup>57</sup> Kaprow, “Magical Work,” 98.

<sup>58</sup> Cox, “The Significance of Fire Service Culture,” 1.

the novice and the senior firefighter: “Relative silence and deferential behavior reflect the newcomers’ lack of expertise and offer something in exchange for the veterans’ assistance.”<sup>59</sup> It is the duty of the senior firefighter to groom young firefighters; essentially turning “boys into men.” Cox suggested that: “research has shown that predominantly male workforces significantly influence workplace cultures in numerous ways. One of the most important factors may be seen as the informal hierarchy established within the workplace where senior firefighters mentor new recruits regarding the knowledge and skills of firefighting.”<sup>60</sup> Unlike the more formal role of the company officer, the senior firefighter is most like an older and wiser brother.

In addition, Cox emphasized the role of the senior firefighter in the socialization of young firefighters: “Their teaching roles extend beyond typical manipulative evolutions; they are the flag bearers of culture as they stabilize social behaviors through example and social reprimand.”<sup>61</sup> The senior firefighter maintains tradition through action and stories of experience and bravery.

Indoctrination into the firehouse culture has also traditionally included methods akin to hazing, as Chetkovich described: “Practical jokes, again ranging from the obvious to the subtle, are characteristic of both firefighter interaction and veteran-hazing of newcomers.”<sup>62</sup> Firefighters propose that hazing rituals help to reveal whether or not a new firefighter has the right stuff and to weed out those who do not.<sup>63</sup> Successful newcomers develop a thick skin in order to avoid displays of weakness. Defenders of the custom believe that if one cannot handle the practice, then that person probably does not belong in the fire service.<sup>64</sup>

The dark side of this initiation ritual arises when boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable are left undefined. According to Hulett et al.:

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<sup>59</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Cox, “The Significance of Fire Service Culture,” 44.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.



[s]ome observers describe these activities as traditional, harmless fun which builds teamwork, relieves boredom, and attracts volunteers. Others emphasize instances in which pranks and hazing turns nasty, especially with sexist, racist, and homophobic content, and represents harassment and intimidation intended to test and drive out unwelcome individuals.<sup>65</sup>

Newcomers who struggle with fitting in may be particularly challenged by discerning whether initiation customs and pranks are a rite of passage or a personal attack. Suspending a firefighter's gear from the ceiling when it is not properly stowed, nicknaming, and bucketing the unobservant newcomer with water are traditional fire service initiation customs. These indoctrination rituals may put non-traditional firefighters in an ambiguous situation which not all are well-equipped to navigate, especially when the newcomer feels singled out in relation to his or her peers. One of the firefighters interviewed by Perrott expressed how these rituals may be misinterpreted by new firefighters who lacked an understanding of fire service culture: "One woman said that people who 'go into the job green' will not have an understanding and will probably find it a real shock to the system, referring specifically to the daily jokes and banter that can be 'taken the wrong way.'" <sup>66</sup> Along these lines, I was told early in my career not to take being made fun of or yelled at as a bad thing. Rather, it was if the guys did not tease or speak to me that that I should be concerned.

## **E. TRADITION—RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

When in Rome...

An often repeated adage is that the fire service is based in "100 years of tradition unimpeded by progress."<sup>67</sup> Tradition is highly guarded in the fire service. Upholding tradition reinforces group solidarity by establishing a set of informal rules and guidelines to follow. Group solidarity is highly desirable, if not vital, in hazardous professions where service members may be placed in life-threatening situations. For many among the

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<sup>65</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Perrott, "Beyond 'Token' Firefighters."

<sup>67</sup> Fire service organizations such as the International Association of Fire Chiefs and fire service publications including *Fire Engineering* refer to this adage when referencing the challenges faced by fire service leadership in promoting change. At times, the adage refers to 150 or 200 years of tradition, as opposed to 100 years.

firefighting ranks, there is little reason to change what has seemingly worked well for 100 years and more. In some respects, there is validity to this position. In fact, Chetkovich advised against concerted attempts to change a legitimately functional workplace culture, stating that such efforts would likely fail.<sup>68</sup> However, the defense of tradition becomes a problem for policy makers who are met with resistance when attempting to promote institutional change.

Akabas wrote that: “The research literature on change suggests that to change, the candidates have to be aware of the need to change.”<sup>69</sup> In the case of the fire service, the need to change is not apparent for many members of a proud and distinctive workplace culture, as described by Hulett et al.: “These cultures tend to evolve slowly and resist change both actively and passively. Resistance tends to be particularly strong where employees remain for long careers, personal relationships are strong, traditions are maintained with pride, and employment is well rewarded—all circumstances describing firefighting.”<sup>70</sup> For firefighters, maintenance of the culture equates to the preservation of a valued way of life.

When new members join the service, it is expected that they will acclimate to the firehouse and firefighting life, not the other way around. In an interview with a Toronto firefighter, Braedley described the firefighter’s belief that new hires should become accustomed to the workplace culture without regard to possible racial or gender disparity:

He felt that newcomers should adapt to the existing culture and, due to his position as a white working class man whose family members have also worked in fire services, he could not perceive the racializing and gendering effects of these practices. He saw these practices as common to all firefighters and part of the folkways and traditions of the brotherhood of firefighting.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 182.

<sup>69</sup> Akabas, “Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration,” 83.

<sup>70</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Braedley, “Emergencies of Care,” 250.

In this narrative, there is little awareness of how fire service culture may be a social construction that benefits certain groups and not others. Instead, fire service culture is viewed as a neutral entity which stands on its own merit.

Given the strong adherence to fire service tradition and culture, Cox argued that for cultural change to occur, it must come from below:

I believe that while fire service hierarchical leadership structures are necessary and effective for managing daily small-scale incidents, these same structures will never succeed at institutionalizing lasting organizational changes. Fire service cultural changes must occur organically, from bottom-up leadership. In other words, change should be cultivated by organizational leaders, not mandated by them.<sup>72</sup>

The fact that firefighters are indoctrinated early into the fire service culture with the “follow the leader mentality,” and then rewarded by being enveloped into the brotherhood, makes the likelihood of change cultivated from the bottom up unlikely. Fire service culture is reinforced and continues to endure.

## **F. CULTURAL SUMMARY**

The notions of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition are essential to understanding the masculine culture of firefighting. The ability to promote change will be ineffective if the value of these concepts is not recognized. As non-traditional populations enter this homogenous workplace culture, the challenge for leadership is to find a way to acknowledge the value of the concepts that define fire service culture while facilitating positive integration of the workforce.

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<sup>72</sup> Cox, “The Significance of Fire Service Culture,” 3.

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### III. CASE STUDY A—WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING

It has been 40 years since the first career woman firefighter was hired in the United States, but the fire service still struggles with best practices for the integration of women. Whereas a few large city fire departments do claim as many as 15% women in their ranks,<sup>73</sup> many career departments have no women firefighters,<sup>74</sup> making the national average of career women firefighters 3.5 percent according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016.<sup>75</sup> Charges of gender discrimination continue to result in lawsuits. A 2012 gender-discrimination lawsuit filed against the Chicago Fire Department resulted in a settlement requiring a \$3.8 million payout by the city of Chicago.<sup>76</sup> Gender and racial discrimination lawsuits against the Los Angeles Fire Department from 2005 to 2014 have cost the department over \$19 million.<sup>77</sup> Chicago and Los Angeles are not alone as harassment and discrimination lawsuits span fire services across the United States.<sup>78</sup> The prevalence of these lawsuits suggests that women are not yet integrating fully or comfortably in the fire services.

The obstacles to the healthy integration of women in fire service are not unique to the United States; similar challenges are found within other western fire services, including Canada and Australia. In keeping with the analysis of fire service culture, many of the impediments faced by women firefighters may also be compartmentalized within the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition.

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<sup>73</sup> According to Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 2; Minneapolis, MN; Madison, WI; and San Francisco, CA are identified as large U.S. fire departments where women make up at least 15 percent of firefighting force.

<sup>74</sup> According to Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 1; approximately 50 percent of metropolitan areas did not have any career women firefighters based on data from the 2000 U.S. Census.

<sup>75</sup> Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, accessed February 12, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/cpsaat11.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> John Byrne, “Chicago to Pay \$3.8 Million as Part of Fire Department Gender Bias Case,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 2016, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-chicago-fire-department-lawsuit-gender-bias-met-20161209-story.html>.

<sup>77</sup> David Zahniser, “City is paying heavily for LAFD bias suits,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2015, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-adv-fire-lawsuits-20150504-story.html>.

<sup>78</sup> “Fire Law Blog,” accessed January 14, 2017, [www.firelawblog.com/tag/sex-discrimination/](http://www.firelawblog.com/tag/sex-discrimination/).

## A. ENTITLEMENT—ARE WOMEN CAPABLE FIREFIGHTERS?

There is rarely a shortage of applicants for career firefighting jobs, resulting in high competition for a few available positions. To diversify the ranks, some fire departments have used targeted recruitment with specialized training programs to attract non-traditional candidates. Other attempts to diversify include modifying how entry-level physical and mental aptitudes are tested and measured. The consequence that often follows is a stigma levied on non-traditional firefighters based on the perception that they have received special treatment in order to be hired. Women firefighters, in particular, are scrutinized over whether or not they have the ability to perform and whether they are deserving of the occupation.

One of the reasons cited for the low percentage of women in fire service is that women are simply not interested in firefighting. Hulett et al. challenged this assumption by compiling 2000 U.S. Census employment data from occupations requiring similar physical and mental stamina and analogous work-related hazards. They determined that women account for approximately 17 percent of the comparable labor workforce.<sup>79</sup> Reviewing the report in a *Fire Engineering* commentary in April 2010, Mary Hauprich wrote: “[T]o combat the argument that women ‘just aren’t interested in firefighting,’ we need to appeal equally to men and women in our recruitment efforts.” Targeted recruitment is a means for achieving this balance.

Recruitment efforts that focus on appealing to an underrepresented section of the population are controversial. The argument against targeted recruitment is that it gives select populations an unfair advantage in the hiring process. This sentiment is not unlike the response to affirmative action policies. Braedley described the situation in Toronto Fire Services: “[A]n affirmative action policy was added that gave qualified women and people from racialized groups first refusal on available positions. Yet, the general opinion was that women and non-white men were not as well qualified as white men recruits, and were employed as firefighters due to their sex or skin colour [*sic*] alone.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Braedley, “Emergencies of Care,” 211.

The defense of targeted recruitment is that it helps to level an uneven playing field — but even this effort is double-edged. Pacholok explained how the leveled playing field argument negatively affects women candidates:

In the same way that hiring criteria, such as personality type and fitting in, disadvantage women, the level playing field works to the advantage of men and functions to justify the exclusion of women. Invoking this metaphor is a low-risk discursive strategy for gender inclusion; relatively few women apply for structural firefighting jobs, and those who do may be disqualified for failing the fitness test, not having the right personality, or scoring fewer total points because they lack a trade or sports background. Since most women are at a disadvantage from the start, they must be truly exceptional to make it through the screening process.<sup>81</sup>

The presumption that the firefighting test is open and fair to all overlooks the details that suggest there is an advantage for applicants with prior fire service knowledge or a personal connection to fire service. As an example, Hulett et al. pointed out that training prior to testing strongly influences successful pass rates for firefighter candidates.<sup>82</sup> Those with prior fire service knowledge, including access to training programs, stand to benefit. It would logically follow that departments invested in increasing their number of women firefighters offer some form of physical preparation geared for women prior to testing and hire. However, preparation classes designed to target specific populations have met with pushback:

During the 1990s, some departments discontinued these classes, despite their success. The reasons given included statewide initiatives banning affirmative action, budget cuts, pressure from the local firefighters' union, and perceptions of unfairness (i.e., recruits participating in "the women's program" were alleged to have an unfair advantage due to familiarity with test equipment). To replace these programs, some women started training programs outside their departments, in gyms and backyards, often attended by recruits of both genders.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 48.

<sup>82</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

In many regards, these informal gym and backyard programs designed by women firefighters have served to recreate the family and neighborhood rituals enjoyed by traditional firefighting candidates. But despite the claims made by Hulett et al. that the programs were often attended by men as well as women, in my experience very few men would attend female-driven firefighter training programs. The reason men opt out is most likely a combination between feeling the program was not open to men and the experience of role strain associated with attending a program designed by and for women.

Gender-specific programs have met with criticism. The United Women Firefighters (UWF) of the FDNY has worked to provide physical preparation classes for women firefighter candidates since 1988.<sup>84</sup> Early in my career, I spoke of my participation in the UWF training program. An incumbent firefighter replied that the problem that he had with the program was that it was not open to men. Meanwhile, there were other training programs that were available to men at that time. The UWF program was not the only game in town, but it was the only program specifically targeting women. The fact that the program was only for women bred animosity.

In addition to targeted recruitment and specialized training, changed entrance requirements are criticized as a lowering of standards designed solely to increase the number of women in firefighting. Criticisms abounded in the case of Oakland fire service recruits in the 1990s:

They challenged the qualifications of some classmates by claiming that these people lacked the strength, understanding, and proper attitude to be good firefighters and that they might well endanger coworkers. These judgments were not always based on differences in prior experience or race and sex, but there was considerable criticism of affirmative action policies and the “lowering” of standards that had accompanied these policies.<sup>85</sup>

Whether in 1990 or 2010, the ability of firefighters and firefighting candidates to perform the job is questioned as hiring standards shift. Firefighters interviewed by

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<sup>84</sup> On the UWF webpage, a retired FDNY Fire Marshal speaks of her involvement with the UWF/John Jay College firefighter physical training from its inception in 1988. At that time, the program was known as the John Jay Training Program. <http://www.unitedwomenfirefighters.org/training-testimonials>.

<sup>85</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 51.



Pacholok expressed concerns about women's physical abilities: "This apparent lack of strength is problematic, according to Steve and his colleagues, not only because it is required to pass the fitness test, but because firefighters must have the ability to pull their colleagues out of burning buildings, which is a difficult physical feat, according to most."<sup>86</sup> The scenario proposing that women are not strong enough to pull a fellow firefighter from a burning building is a common argument made for why women should not be firefighters, despite the fact that rescue operations are typically a team effort.

Hulett et al. countered that these types of fears are based in stereotypes about women's perceived lack of strength, while ignoring the high level of physical fitness typical of women firefighter recruits.<sup>87</sup> The debate between hiring the most physically fit candidate versus the candidate who is fit enough to do the job centers on the primacy of physical prowess in determining who is most qualified to be a firefighter.

It also raises serious questions about the appropriateness of traditional physical requirements. Physical agility testing characteristically consists of the timed completion of events that simulate fire ground tasks including lifting and climbing ladders, hoisting equipment, and stretching hose lines. Events such as scaling walls, which rely heavily on upper body strength yet are infrequently performed in the course of firefighting duties, are still found in some traditional physical agility tests for firefighter.<sup>88</sup> In addition, firefighter applicants are rank ordered by speed of completion of the tasks in traditional physical agility testing.<sup>89</sup> Relative speed is a measure that disadvantages most women candidates. Rather than accurately reflecting the duties of firefighting, fire service officials interviewed by Boggs in California in the 1990s noted that physical testing functioned as a barrier to impede the success of women and other non-traditional

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<sup>86</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Firefighter Agility Test Requirements – City of Mount Vernon New York, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://cmvny.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CS-Firefighter-Agility-Test-Requirements.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> Traditional Physical Agilities Testing (PAT) differs from the modern Candidate Physical Agilities Testing (CPAT) in that PATs are not standardized but are based on the terms of the individual fire department. The CPAT is a standardized pass/fail test designed by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) which requires the test taker to complete the test within the allotted time, however there is no rank privilege for speed of completion.

applicants.<sup>90</sup> Across the country in New York City, Smith elaborated on the lack of support for the first FDNY women firefighters as the firefighting unions in New York City pushed “to make the traditionally tough physical requirements uniform for all applicants.”<sup>91</sup> And yet, as Chetkovich had pointed out in Oakland, the same physical standards did not apply to less fit incumbent firefighters who were granted exemption from having to maintain physical entrance standards by having “paid their dues.”<sup>92</sup> In fact, in many fire departments there is no incumbent testing, the only time that firefighters are tested to meet physical standards is in the recruit academy.

The apprehension over changing standards goes deeper than the concern about physical ability and risk to professional and public safety. It is also rooted in perceptions of fairness. Speaking of the first FDNY women firefighters, Akabas wrote; “Instead of being praised for their accomplishment, they forever carried the stigma, in the male firefighters’ definition, of having been appointed by passing a test specifically designed to “assure their appointment.”<sup>93</sup> After my appointment to the FDNY in 1996, I was repeatedly told by fellow firefighters that I got on the fire department “the right way” because I had passed the same test as the men in my recruit class. This comment served as much to undercut the first FDNY women firefighters as it did to compliment my achievement. It is important to note that the test my recruit class took was not the same as the test administered at the time of the first FDNY women firefighters hired in 1982. In fact, the physical agility test required for FDNY firefighter candidates had changed three times since 1982.

Smith wrote of the burden the first FDNY women faced: “Male firefighters resented the fact that the standards, according to their perception of firefighting, were being reduced to permit the appointment of women to the ranks. I supposed there’s no doubt that standards were changed, but whether they were lowered, the women

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<sup>90</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 127.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, *Firefighters*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Akabas, “Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration,” 80.

firefighters feel, is an issue worth discussing.”<sup>94</sup> For the twenty years and more that many of these women served the FDNY, I heard the scorn expressed by many male firefighters over the conditions of the first women’s hiring. Perceptions of special treatment and the associated stigmas directly impacted the women’s membership to the firefighting in-group and their sense of belonging.

## **B. BELONGING—SISTERS WITHIN THE BROTHERHOOD**

Firehouses traditionally have been characterized as having a fraternity-like environment. The fire service in the United States was an all-male workforce until the mid-1970s, with only a nominal number of women hired in the years that followed. Older firehouses were constructed to accommodate a single-sex labor force with a common bunkroom and group shower facilities. Firefighting uniforms, equipment, and gear were designed to male specifications. Behavior and language reinforced the masculine culture and surroundings. In theory, there was no privilege or special treatment granted to any newcomer walking into the firehouse. What developed was a sense of camaraderie within the firefighting way of life that amounted to much more than a job.<sup>95</sup>

The entry of women into the fire service threatened to disrupt the brotherhood that defined firefighting. Women firefighters have often found themselves having to accommodate to privacy issues, ill-fitting uniforms and gear, and masculine grooming standards.<sup>96</sup> These matters continue to remain unresolved in many departments today. According to Hulett et al., almost half of the women firefighters questioned experienced privacy issues in bathrooms, dressing or sleeping areas.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, 79 percent of women firefighters have been challenged by gear scaled for men which, in turn, compromises performance and safety.<sup>98</sup> For example, in one study, at least one third of

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<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Firefighters*, 139.

<sup>95</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 133.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>97</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

women firefighters surveyed reported poorly fitting gloves that limit dexterity and grip.<sup>99</sup> Because of the low numbers of women in the workforce, many fire departments fail to procure suitably-sized equipment and clothing despite the fact that manufacturers have offered gear designed to women's specifications since the mid-1990s.<sup>100</sup> The unavailability of appropriately-sized department-issued gear leaves women firefighters with the choice of either purchasing their own or making do with what is issued. Either way, without a critical mass of women firefighters, departments are unlikely to feel a sense of urgency to address the need.

Members of the majority often view that a special accommodation is being made when budgets are revised to fund projects and equipment that seemingly benefit only a small population of the workforce, such as the construction of separate bathroom facilities for women firefighters. The concept of special accommodation threatens the shared group identity and sense of belonging when the accommodation is not perceived as benefiting the whole. Boggs described how women firefighters found themselves subject to additional scrutiny following departmental changes made to meet the needs of a mixed-gender workforce:

Over time, fire officials have implemented construction projects to create new bathroom and sleeping arrangements in fire stations, and have gradually adopted new rules and procedures for dress and work activities that take women's needs into account. But changes made to accommodate women have often provoked morale problems among male firefighters, who consider them, along with alterations in hiring procedures, as evidence of special treatment.<sup>101</sup>

The importance of becoming a part of the firehouse and embracing firehouse culture is stressed to new firefighters. But, as Chetkovich pointed out the process of becoming part of that in-group is much harder for women than men.<sup>102</sup> The ability to fit in and attain a sense of belonging is further challenged when one is perceived as

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<sup>99</sup> Hongwei Hsiao et al., "Firefighter Hand Anthropometry and Structural Glove Sizing: A New Perspective," *Human Factors* 57, no. 8 (2015): 1359.

<sup>100</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Boggs, "Equal Employment Opportunity," 129.

<sup>102</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 157.

receiving special treatment. Therefore, reinforcing the belief that new firefighters should adapt to preserve the existing culture, the presumption is that women should adjust to the existing situation, not that the situation should adjust to women.

Hulett et al. explained that the ramifications of this gender divide are psychological as well as physical: “[T]he issue typically involves women having not only physical space in the firehouse but also psychological space—acknowledging that they are full, permanent members of the work team by accommodating their needs and preferences.”<sup>103</sup> The women firefighters interviewed by Boggs expressed concerns over whether their coworkers would support them and whether they were respected for their firefighting abilities: “Like the men, women firefighters expressed concerns about being able to count on their male colleagues’s [sic] support when they needed it. But their concerns differed from the men’s in that they were based on the perception that certain men would not be willing to help them when they could, rather than from worries about men’s lack of abilities.”<sup>104</sup>

Skepticism of women’s physical abilities and beliefs that women firefighters have special needs or bring an agenda of promoting change have generated explicit and implicit forms of exclusion by critical coworkers. Common ways that women have historically been excluded from the firefighting in-group include the silent treatment from peers and the disparagement of women’s abilities. Receiving the silent treatment or being ignored can be particularly uncomfortable in the firehouse where firefighters often spend up to 24 hours on shift together. Boggs explained how these forms of exclusion have played out for women in both the firehouse and on the fire ground:

Networking concerns included being ignored or excluded from regular workplace banter. Women felt they were subject to patronizing treatment from male firefighters when their contributions to fire station life and the crew’s work in the field were ignored or belittled; for example, when they provided information about using a piece of equipment to a male crew mate and he asked another man for his opinion before using it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 134.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

The low number of women firefighters invariably places women under the microscope where job abilities are further scrutinized. When a male firefighter fails at a task, the typical response is that he is individually insufficient as a firefighter or may need more training. When a woman firefighter fails at a task, it is not uncommon to be used as a broad justification for why women as a group should not be firefighters. Rosell, Miller, and Barber theorized: “As the new and probably only ‘girl in the station,’ women firefighters are perceived as females first, and firefighters second.”<sup>106</sup> Unless women firefighters are considered equals, as firefighters first, exclusionary tactics such as silent treatment and patronization are likely to endure.

Another way that women firefighters are excluded is through the use of gender-specific language. At the most elementary level, exclusionary language starts with the persistent use of the term “fireman” as opposed to “firefighter” and collectively referring to the “brothers” when there are “sisters” present. Boggs identified how attempts to use gender-neutral language have met with resistance: “One issue underlining the difficulty some of the men felt in accepting women as full ingroup [*sic*] members was their insistence on continuing to call themselves ‘firemen’ instead of ‘firefighters.’”<sup>107</sup> While there are many who will argue that the terms “fireman” and “brothers” are intended to include firefighters of both genders, these terms actually make women invisible.

It is worth noting that this form of exclusion is not solely the property of fire service members. As I sat in the honor company row at the funeral of a firefighter from my firehouse, a speaker from the mayor’s office attempted to comfort the fallen firefighter’s wife by saying that her children had an extended family of brothers from the firehouse. Interestingly, it was the young daughter who was most upset at the spokesperson’s exclusion of my gender in that narrative. The daughter approached me immediately after the service, heatedly proclaiming that she and her brothers had a sister from the firehouse too.

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<sup>106</sup> Rosell, Miller and Barber, “Firefighting Women,” 347.

<sup>107</sup> Boggs, “Equal Employment Opportunity,” 140.

The illustrations above are not to suggest that all women firefighters are automatically excluded from in-group membership. In fact, Willing claimed that the sense of belonging felt by women firefighters varies widely from those being openly welcomed to others facing hostility and being actively excluded by leadership and coworkers alike.<sup>108</sup> As with all newcomers, to attain a sense of belonging, the firefighter must be welcomed by her peers and then respond by proving she is worthy of acceptance to the firefighting team. In this regard, many women firefighters have developed adaptive mechanisms to help them navigate the masculine environment. Pacholok described this navigation as a dance between acquiescence and resistance that women firefighters use to prove themselves.<sup>109</sup>

One way that women acquiesce is to minimize or negate personal needs and tolerate unfavorable conditions, including sexual jokes and innuendos, as a rite of passage to group membership. This form of acquiescence was described by Braedley:

Certainly successful women firefighters appeared to draw upon firefighting masculinities in similar ways, by learning to “suck it up” and take sexual harassment as a badge of belonging. They existed in a trans-gendered space of a kind, embodying just enough masculinity while at the same time embodying sufficient hetero-femininity in order to allow their colleagues to remain the masculine ones.<sup>110</sup>

Acquiescence may consist of the woman firefighter joining in comments and behavior which sexualize women, maintaining that the comments do not apply to her. “Sucking it up” may also exist in the failure to protest. Remaining silent runs the risk of sending the message that the sexualized behavior is not objectionable whether or not, in reality, it is.

Maneuvering in this trans-gendered space requires a delicate balance, which Chetkovich acknowledged when she wrote that “the women faced a dilemma that did not confront the men: some measure of social integration was essential, but at the same time, the wrong kind of social assimilation could become a kind of trap, a substitute for

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<sup>108</sup> Willing, *On the Line*, 12.

<sup>109</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 91.

<sup>110</sup> Braedley, “Emergencies of Care,” 251.

professional acceptance.”<sup>111</sup> In my experience, the women firefighters who have greatest success at navigating this fraternal territory do so by establishing clearly defined personal boundaries about the appropriateness of comments, jokes, and behavior, and have become quite adept at walking a fine line that balances personal integrity with in-group acceptance. Early in my career, I was advised by senior women firefighters to arrive early and leave early from off-duty fire department functions to avoid unwanted comments and behavior that would potentially arise where alcohol consumption was prevalent. In addition, some women colleagues deliberately chose to avoid or limit alcohol use while participating in group socialization to maintain the perception of integrity and professionalism in an environment where women often find themselves one of very few, if not the only, woman in the room.

### C. PRIDE

The mere sight of a woman firefighter invokes curiosity. Chetkovich wrote that “seeing another member of one’s social group in a nontraditional role can provide an expanded sense of possibility and pride, even to one uninterested in that work itself.”<sup>112</sup> That sense of pride is infectious. I have commonly received cheers such as “you go, girl” and “woman power” from women and men on the street, which have served to bolster my own blended feelings of self-consciousness and pride. As there are so few women firefighters, it is a tremendous feeling of accomplishment for the few who succeed in joining the ranks of fire service. The feeling is analogous to gaining privileged membership status to a special club. The belief is that only the exceptional will make it.

As gratifying as it is to be one of the exceptional ones, this high visibility amid a small population has its own costs. In her analysis of gender in the military, Carreiras wrote “due to their limited proportion—the very few among the very many—these women became tokens, that is, representatives of their category rather than independent individuals.”<sup>113</sup> Common strategies used to compensate for the social segregation

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<sup>111</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 133.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 33.



inherent to tokenism are identified by Carreiras as; “overachievement, hiding successes, or turning against people of their own kind.”<sup>114</sup> Turning against other women firefighters is an attempt to separate oneself when another woman’s shortcoming becomes symbolic of the token group. However, despite this attempt to distinguish oneself from the token category, the woman firefighter still never fully integrates with the dominant group. She is always separate.

As representatives of a category, women firefighters are often compared to each other. Comparisons of women firefighters may be made by male and female firefighters who qualify women firefighters in terms of ability and favorability. For example, I have heard firefighters state “we got one of the good ones” when favorably describing a woman firefighter assigned to their unit. A “good” woman firefighter, in this definition, is one who is not only perceived as capable of doing her job, but also as one who is not trying to change fire service culture. By qualifying the woman firefighter as “one of the good ones,” firefighters maintain company pride and reputation that might otherwise be questioned because of her presence, without taking a strong stand about women in the fire service. While this qualification may be a veiled attempt by the woman firefighter’s peers to distinguish her from women firefighters as a collective group, it still situates her squarely in the category of “woman firefighter” as opposed to simply “firefighter.” I have never heard a male firefighter described as “one of the good ones.”

At the same time, as representatives of a collective group, women firefighters become acutely aware of how their individual actions and performance may be viewed as a reflection of the actions and performance of women firefighters as a whole. In this sense, the individual woman firefighter will feel the burden not only of proving herself but of having to establish the place of her gender in firefighting. Perrott described the microscope that women firefighters often find themselves under: “The interviews uncovered a repeated pattern whereby the women were concerned that any individual ‘failures’ would lead to adverse assumptions that they did not deserve a place in the fire service.”<sup>115</sup> It is not unusual for individual “failures” to become a reflection of women

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Perrott, “Beyond ‘Token’ Firefighters.

firefighters' abilities in general and be used to argue the opinion that women, collectively, do not belong in fire service.

In her interviews, Perrott found that "all ten women wanted to prove that they were unlike 'other' women and therefore fit the criteria for firefighting, which has historically excluded women."<sup>116</sup> Perrott claimed that this desire had little to do with challenging general beliefs about women's abilities. Rather, the impression is that the women who do succeed are anomalies. For Pacholok, this construction of the exceptional woman helps to situate women in the fire service without compromising the masculine attributes and values of firefighting.<sup>117</sup> Any admittance that women, in general, can be skilled firefighters would blur the masculinities that define firefighting. However, the belief that only an exceptional woman can be a firefighter maintains the construct that firefighting is inherently a man's profession.

This construction of the exceptional woman trickles down into the beliefs that women firefighters may maintain about each other. The Queen Bee Syndrome occurs when a woman firefighter feels she is better or more deserving of her job than other women. Women firefighters who do not want to be defined by a category may also respond by attempting to distinguish themselves from the rest of the women—a practice by which some women firefighters seek to defend their individual merit. Alluding that she does not share the same weakness or would not make a similar mistake, a woman firefighter may distance herself from other women by openly questioning or putting down another woman firefighter's abilities and actions. Another means for promoting individual exceptionalism at the expense of other women is boasting about getting the job without the help of targeted recruitment or women's training programs.

The Queen Bee holds the other women firefighters personally accountable for whatever struggles they may be facing, with the belief that a struggling firefighter would not have problems if she were stronger, had thicker skin, or worked harder. Underlying the Queen Bee Syndrome is the concern that one woman's challenges will reflect poorly

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 40.

on the women firefighters who can “do the job.” In this regard, the Queen Bee Syndrome is a trap that further hinders positive gender integration efforts.

#### **D. INDOCTRINATION AND MENTORSHIP**

The indoctrination stage is the formative time when a new firefighter is being molded to become a valued member of his or her fire company. Indoctrination into the fire service is imbedded in the mentoring relationships established between senior firefighters and the newcomer, as well as initiation rituals which traditionally include firehouse jokes and pranks. Because new firefighters who are familiar with fire service culture have a distinct advantage in this grooming process, mentorship is particularly valuable for women who enter the profession knowing less about fire service culture.

Despite the satisfaction provided by the work itself, it becomes difficult to excel in a workplace culture that is resistant to change without mentorship and support. Chetkovich argued that peer support plays a critical role in a woman firefighter’s development: “Finding a supportive crew was critical for the women’s development as firefighters in three ways: (1) it reduced or eliminated the tension that made it hard for newcomers to practice and learn; (2) it signaled to the women that they could in fact be firefighters; and (3) it provided a model of firefighter identity to which the women could aspire.”<sup>118</sup> As with any newcomer, the development of a trusting relationship with a well-respected senior firefighter is invaluable for women in fire service. Not only does the relationship convey to the woman firefighter that she is a valued member of the company, but the relationship also reinforces to the other firefighters that the senior firefighter values the new firefighter enough to invest his time in her.

The most valuable mentors treat their protégés without excess or exception. However, there is an implied relationship with mentoring that may produce hesitation on behalf of the firefighter who does not want to show excessive interest in a woman firefighter by taking her under his wing. Being overly attentive may be interpreted as being salacious.

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<sup>118</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 124.

The hesitation in mentoring women is not limited to male firefighters. The Queen Bee is often reluctant to mentor other women, as women firefighters who distance themselves are often unlikely even to want another woman firefighter assigned to their firehouse. When I joined the fire department in the late 1990s, I expected that I would meet resistance from the men. What I did not anticipate was the cold shoulder that I received from the senior woman in my firehouse.

In addition to training and grooming the young firefighter, the senior firefighter also has the role of setting the tone and resolving conflicts so that problems do not reach the level of the commanding officer. Customs such as deliberately hanging a firefighter's gear from the ceiling when he or she forgets to properly stow the gear away at the end of the tour of duty are used to teach accountability for equipment and rarely require senior firefighter mediation. However, practices that border or constitute harassment are another matter entirely where the intervention of the senior firefighter may prove to be critical to stopping the practice while avoiding the involvement of formal oversight.

It is this less-than-formal redress of grievances that propels many women to rely on the support of mentors to deal with harassment.<sup>119</sup> Formal complaint procedures bring the fear of backlash from fellow firefighters who may not only feel that the matter has been overblown but that matter should have been kept in firehouse rather than inviting formal oversight. If a firefighter advises an officer of harassment based on protected categories such as gender, formal notification procedures must legally follow. By advising a respected senior firefighter of a problem, chances are greater that the problem may be resolved without retribution.

I was a firefighter for almost five years and the only woman in my firehouse when sexually explicit materials repeatedly appeared in the woman's shower room. Reporting through formal channels was certainly an option, but one that I did not want to pursue out of the fear of being ostracized. If I had reported to the commanding officer, he would have been mandated to file a formal complaint. Instead, I brought the issue to my senior man and the practice promptly stopped.

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<sup>119</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 9.

In the interviews that Boggs recorded, male firefighters' support was vital for women who might otherwise have left the fire service over pervasive sexism.<sup>120</sup> Union support is also an important factor in combatting harassment, as indicated by Rosell, Miller, and Barber: "Of the non-harassed women firefighters, 82 percent reported a supportive union compared to 56.4 percent of their harassed co-workers."<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, according to Hulett et al., few of the women firefighters interviewed indicated that they had received support from men as they struggled to develop their skills within the firehouse environment.<sup>122</sup>

The initiation process for a new firefighter traditionally includes being the subject of pranks and firehouse jokes. This custom has been defended as a means for building teamwork. Initiation jokes and pranks are promoted as a means for identifying a newcomer's strengths and weaknesses to see if he or she will hold up when push comes to shove in the demanding world of firefighting.

Prior to my first tour of duty in the firehouse, I was told to accept pranks and teasing as a rite of passage inherent to my status as a probationary firefighter and that the teasing would have nothing to do with my gender. I was advised that I needed to develop a thick skin. However, the initiation pranks and rituals that I had been expecting did not appear right away. If anything, unlike my male peers, I was treated with such caution that I felt I did not fit it. It was not until a few years into my career when I stood out in front of the firehouse one morning where I was doused with a bucket of water dumped on me from an upper floor of the firehouse. Being the subject of a prank in the same way as my peers was the moment when I finally felt I had been accepted.

Chetkovich described how the initiation process historically has not worked equally well for women and men:

Those who might be willing to accept women as coworkers are sometimes reluctant to accord them the same treatment they do male newcomers for fear of being "taken downtown" (disciplined). The result is that women

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<sup>120</sup> Boggs, "Equal Employment Opportunity," 135.

<sup>121</sup> Rosell, Miller and Barber, "Firefighting Women," 345.

<sup>122</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 10.

often find themselves in the peculiar position of being ineligible to receive the traditional forms of initiation and yet subject to a good deal of alienation and hostility.<sup>123</sup>

The reluctance to apply the same initiation process can be problematic when a non-traditional population enters the workforce. It may be argued that exempting women from the initiation rituals inhibits the bonding process in the firehouse.

According to Hulett et al., initiation pranks that are defended as an exercise in team-building and good harmless fun have at times degenerated into harassment of specific individuals through the use of derogatory content including sexism, racism, and homophobia.<sup>124</sup> When this occurs, initiation rituals become an excuse for harassment. Golway described the situation faced by many of the first FDNY women firefighters:

Every probie firefighter was forced to endure months of hazing, not unlike a rookie football player or a newcomer to the frat-house, but they also were mentored in the science of firefighting. Many of the women received only the hazing part, and it was particularly cruel. Even though it was the work of a minority of male firefighters, the hazing and harassment reflected poorly on the Department as a whole. Little, if anything, was done to stop it.<sup>125</sup>

While initiation rituals have been a customary tool in the grooming of firefighters, boundaries must be established and maintained. Intercepting initiation pranks before they erode into harassment requires more than a leadership directive. It requires commitment from the bottom-up, most importantly from the senior firefighters in the firehouse.

## **E. TRADITION—RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

Firefighters speak with pride about tradition. The downside is that adherence to tradition rejects new and, in some cases, better practices. Adherence to tradition also serves to perpetuate beliefs such as whether women belong in fire service. The acceptance of women firefighters as equal members depends on the recognition that the fire service must adapt. The issue Akabas encountered when tackling the problem of

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<sup>123</sup> Chetkovich, *Real Heat*, 71.

<sup>124</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Golway, *So Others Might Live*, 271.

gender integration in the FDNY was that the workforce at the time did not feel change was necessary and they responded accordingly: “The brotherhood of New York City firefighters had closed ranks, and let us all know that they did not want to hear or learn anything that might change their minds.”<sup>126</sup> In the two decades that followed Akabas’ study, there was little progress in terms of gender integration the FDNY: “Of all the governmental agencies in New York City, the FDNY has the least diverse labor force. There are fewer women on the force than when our contract ended in 1990.”<sup>127</sup> Even though the number of women firefighters in the FDNY currently surpasses the original number of women hired in 1982, women firefighters in the FDNY still remain less than 1 percent of the workforce.<sup>128</sup> As demonstrated by the resistance to efforts to increase the number of women in fire service, many simply ask why there needs to be more women firefighters.

The argument for diversity lies in the changing responsibilities fire departments face in meeting the needs of the communities that they serve. Medical service calls and non-fire emergencies have become the bulk of fire service response. Depending on the nature of the emergency, people in some communities may feel more comfortable receiving care from a woman. The shift in responsibilities does not negate the physical and mental demands of fire suppression. The point is that the fire service also requires the aptitudes of caregiving and compassion as found in other helping professions typically associated with women’s work; “the shifting balance between fire calls and medical calls brings to prominence skills and abilities which the traditional occupational self-image ignores.”<sup>129</sup> The fire service is evolving and the workforce needs to adapt along with it.

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<sup>126</sup> Akabas, “Fire Department of New York City Confronts Gender Integration,” 83.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>128</sup> According to the New York Daily News, there were a total of 58 women firefighters and fire officers in the FDNY following the November 2016 fire academy graduating class. Ryan Sit and Rich Schapiro, “5 Brave Women Join FDNY,” *New York Daily News*, November 3, 2016, 21. After the first group of 41 women firefighters were hired in 1982, the number of women firefighters in the FDNY dropped to the low 20s when the first women hires became eligible for service retirement. The rate of woman firefighter hires has slowly climbed in recent years but at a rate which creates no statistical increase.

<sup>129</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 11.

## **F. WOMEN IN FIREFIGHTING SUMMARY**

The deconstruction of the woman firefighter experience into the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition explores the extent to which factors impede the successful integration of women into the fire service. Most strikingly, high levels of competition for a limited number of job opportunities make the rate of personnel change very slow. Targeted recruitment and pre-service training programs will help to identify and groom women who are most likely to succeed, but even with a large pool of qualified women candidates the rate of change will be gradual due to the low attrition rate in many fire departments. Despite aggressive recruitment efforts, the rate of change is only as fast as the rate of hiring allows.

Once in the fire service, firefighters navigate through rich elements of fire service culture which include the concept of the brotherhood, the rite of passage from probationary to senior firefighter, and the adherence to tradition. Without a long history in firefighting and therefore limited contribution to the development of fire service culture, women firefighters are more likely to find these cultural elements as unfamiliar and often exclusionary. If these cultural elements do not embrace the inclusion of women, the retention of women in fire service is at risk. On a positive note, women firefighters do share in the pride of being members of what many consider a noble profession and are less likely to experience the challenges associated with gender role strain that hinder men who enter feminized occupations.



## **IV. CASE STUDY B—MEN IN NURSING**

The field of nursing is a gendered helping profession, not unlike firefighting. To be sure, there is a long history of men in nursing; in fact, the Latin term for “nurse” that the classical Romans would have known only has a masculine form. Still, in more recent times, women have been the face of nursing since the days of Florence Nightingale. Lately, however, men have been re-entering the nursing profession at an increasing rate.<sup>130</sup> While the return of men to the profession has helped to address the nursing shortage, it does not necessarily change the perception about who should be a nurse. Studies show that men in nursing confront gender-related issues that are both similar and dissimilar to the impediments faced by women in firefighting. In this context, the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, indoctrination, and tradition also shape the experiences of men in nursing.

### **A. ENTITLEMENT—IS THERE A PLACE FOR MEN IN NURSING?**

Nursing shortages have required that the profession expand its labor pool. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing:

The U.S. is projected to experience a shortage of Registered Nurses (RNs) that is expected to intensify as Baby Boomers age and the need for health care grows. Compounding the problem is the fact that nursing schools across the country are struggling to expand capacity to meet the rising demand for care given the national move toward healthcare reform.<sup>131</sup>

In addition to meeting the needs of an aging population, the environment in which patients are cared for has changed. Brenda Nevidjon and Jeanette Ives Erickson explained: “With decreased length of hospital stays and more acute care in the ambulatory and home settings, the need for experienced, highly skilled nurses is

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<sup>130</sup> Susan Meyers, “Real Men Choose Nursing,” *Trustee* 56, no. 5 (2003): 20.

<sup>131</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing/Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet, [www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/nursing-shortage](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/nursing-shortage), last updated April 24, 2014, accessed November 9, 2016.

unmet.”<sup>132</sup> The changing health care environment suggests that the demand for skilled nurses will not decline anytime soon.

The demand for nurses expands opportunities to a non-traditional workforce. As recently as 2015, Donna Sayman proposed that nursing shortages could be alleviated if more men were attracted to the profession.<sup>133</sup> According to a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau: “About 2.7 percent of registered nurses were men in 1970 compared with 9.6 percent in 2011. Except for a small decline in 1980, men’s representation among licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses grew from 3.9 percent in 1970 to 8.1 percent in 2011.”<sup>134</sup> While the percentage of men in nursing has slowly been increasing, men are still greatly underrepresented in the profession.

Deconstructing the feminized image of nursing is one means for tackling the nursing shortage.<sup>135</sup> In 2003, Susan Meyers quoted then-president of the American Nurses Association, Barbara Blakeley: “When people think of nursing, they think of women in nurturing roles, as ‘handmaidens’ to doctors. But nursing is much more than that. Not only is it high-touch, but it can also be very high-tech. It requires a lot of intelligence and a lot of education in the sciences. And it’s not just for women. There are many opportunities for men as well.”<sup>136</sup> The image of the handmaiden is just one of the nursing feminized stereotypes. Sayman addressed how recruitment campaigns have traditionally been rife with stereotypes: “The angel of mercy, the self-sacrificing caregiver, and the surrogate mother all make an appearance. These advertisements serve to embed the social constructs of a feminized occupation deeper.”<sup>137</sup> In this regard, stereotypically feminine traits such as caring and compassion become representative of nursing.

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<sup>132</sup> Brenda Nevidjon and Jeanette Ives Erickson, “The Nursing Shortage: Solutions for the Short and Long Term,” *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* 6, no. 1 (2000): 1.

<sup>133</sup> Sayman, “Fighting the Trauma Demons,” 9.

<sup>134</sup> Men in Nursing Occupations – Census.gov, <https://www.census.gov/people/files>: 3, issued February 2013, accessed November 9, 2016.

<sup>135</sup> Meyers, “Real Men,” 20.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Sayman, “Fighting the Trauma Demons,” 17.

Men working as nurses do appear on television programs, which indicate a degree of public awareness and acceptance, although, as Weaver et al. illustrate, these public perceptions reinforce stereotypes about men in nursing and have real-world implications. Emphasizing traits that are stereotypically masculine, such as technical skill and logic,<sup>138</sup> popular culture and targeted recruitment have sought to reassert nursing as a manly profession. Pat Starck, of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston, described how the University followed the recommendations of a male focus group to target the recruitment of men:

They told us to get rid of the lavender brochures and the flowery, fluffy language and to replace it with more factual and objective information,” says Pat Starck, dean of the nursing school. “They suggested we play up the macho aspects of nursing, such as trauma and emergency care, advertise in the sports section of the newspaper and provide more male role models.<sup>139</sup>

Following this recruitment strategy, the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston saw a 23 percent enrollment increase among its male students, according to Meyers.<sup>140</sup>

Such recruitment still comes relatively late in a man’s professional development; nursing rarely is presented as a viable career choice to boys and young men at an early age. Susan A. LaRocco implied that the failure of high school counselors to recommend nursing to male students contributed to the lack of awareness of nursing as a career option.<sup>141</sup> This sentiment was shared by focus group participants in a study by Dale Rajacich et al.:

The participants identified a need to “... start [promoting nursing] younger, talk to high school [*sic*] and get men in nursing to talk to the nursing [*sic*] or the classrooms” (Jeff) because young people, young men especially, may not be considering nursing as a career option. Avon recalls, “... going

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<sup>138</sup> Roslyn Weaver et al., “Men in Nursing on Television: Exposing and Reinforcing Stereotypes,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 70, no. 4 (2014): 839.

<sup>139</sup> Meyers, “Real Men,” 20.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Susan A. LaRocco, “A Grounded Theory Study of Socializing Men into Nursing,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 15, no. 2 (2007): 125.

through high school there was [*sic*] people that came to talk about nursing but nobody mentioned about men in nursing...”<sup>142</sup>

In addition, Geraldine Ann Moore and Jacqueline Dienemann recommended exposing young men to emergency and critical care nursing, as well as promoting participation in nursing camps staffed by male nurses.<sup>143</sup> These recruitment strategies are based on the belief that male role models, the technical aspects of nursing, and the adrenalin associated with emergency work and trauma will appeal to a masculine labor pool.

## **B. BELONGING—MEN AS TRUSTED CAREGIVERS**

Beyond helping to fill the void created by the nursing shortage, the question remains as to whether men are suitable for nursing. One of the participants in the focus groups conducted by Rajacich et al. expressed how comments by colleagues early in his career diminished the role of men in nursing: “When I started nursing there were nurses that told me that nursing is for women and that I shouldn’t be in nursing and that it’s just wrong. That thinking has abated a bit.”<sup>144</sup> It has not disappeared, however, and gendered notions of nursing bring up issues of trust and discrimination and are at the root of arguments as to why men do not belong in nursing.

Caregiving is viewed as an inherently feminine trait, an extension of maternal nurturing. Gendered views of caring may affect the impressions patients maintain about men in nursing. In the aforementioned focus groups, nursing students expressed that caring must be de-gendered in order for men to find a place within the profession: “Noting that caring has been historically (and stereotypically) associated with women in our society, they [men in focus group] reframed caring for other people as part of what it is to be a ‘decent human being,’ regardless of whether someone is a man or a woman.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Dale Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse, It Is Always a “Male Nurse”: Experiences of Men in the Nursing Profession,” *Nursing Forum* 48, no. 1 (2013): 77.

<sup>143</sup> Geraldine Ann Moore and Jacqueline A. Dienemann, “Job Satisfaction and Career Development of Men in Nursing,” *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 4, no. 3 (2014): 91.

<sup>144</sup> Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse,” 76.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

The ability to establish trust with clients and colleagues is essential in a caring profession. However, the establishment of trust is hindered by fears and suspicions about male caregiving. How men in nursing struggle with overcoming suspicions about their caring behaviors was discussed in nursing student focus groups conducted by Robert J. Meadus and J. Creina Twomey: “The students talked about how men’s caring behaviors are associated with fear, inappropriateness, and sexuality impacting how they may be perceived by patients, staff, and society in their role as a nurse.”<sup>146</sup> More specifically, men’s use of touch has created situations of mistrust for men in nursing, as described by Joan Evans and Blye Frank: “[M]en’s touch is surrounded with suspicion—suspicion that implies men’s motives for touching are not comfort or care oriented, but sexual in nature.”<sup>147</sup> In some cases, patients have refused to be treated by male nurses due to such suspicions.

Each of the nursing students interviewed by Joshua Smith in his study admitted to having experienced client refusal based on gender: “After being introduced to one of the male nursing students, many patients, particularly in the obstetric/gynecological (OB/GYN) rotation, asked for a female nurse.”<sup>148</sup> One of these nursing students explained the paradox that client refusal creates for men in nursing: “In general, the men were not offended by patient refusals and connected their life experience or maturity to their response. However, they noted that the situation was unfair because they felt competent to do the work. However, they stated emphatically that they did not like the OB/GYN rotation, where many of the incidents occurred.”<sup>149</sup> In some cases, measures have been taken to avoid patient refusal scenarios, such as circumventing certain rotations altogether as described by one of the nursing students interviewed by Meadus and Twomey:

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<sup>146</sup> Robert J. Meadus and J. Creina Twomey, “Men Student Nurses: The Nursing Education Experience,” *Nursing Forum* 46, no. 4 (2011): 274.

<sup>147</sup> Joan Evans and Blye Frank, “Contradictions and Tensions: Exploring Relations of Masculinities in the Numerically Female-Dominated Nursing Profession,” *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 11, no. 3, 281.

<sup>148</sup> Joshua S. Smith, “Exploring the Challenges for Nontraditional Male Students Transitioning into a Nursing Program,” *Journal of Nursing Education* 45, no. 7 (2006): 267.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

In our maternity clinical one group went to the OR, the other went to Diagnostic Imaging and the other students went to Women's Health. So the professor decided from past experience that they had negative feedback from guys going to Women's Health because the women didn't feel comfortable having a male in the room, so the professor assigned all the guys to the OR.<sup>150</sup>

However, skipping rotations is not always an option. Accepting patient refusal simply becomes part of the reality for men in nursing.

The discomfort with certain clinical rotations is coupled with the funneling of men and women in nursing toward particular specialties and tasks. Orla Muldoon and Jacqueline Reilly examined whether men and women were attracted to or better suited for specific nursing disciplines. Their findings indicated some gender distinctions. At the time of their study, women only were deemed appropriate for midwifery and school nursing, whereas mental health and learning disability nursing were viewed as more appropriate for men because of presumed need for physical strength when working with mentally-challenged patients.<sup>151</sup>

Steering men toward specific nursing tasks has led to charges of discrimination. In LaRocco's study: "One man felt that there was discrimination in patient assignments because of 'getting the unruly patients all the time—male patients.'"<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Meadus and Twomey explained how: "[s]everal of the study participants described how they felt discriminated against by nursing staff solely because of their gender as 'muscle' to lift or move patients and at times to offset or control potential violent situations."<sup>153</sup> However, as LaRocco indicates, not all men in nursing claim to have experienced discrimination; in fact, some of her interviewees were emphatic that they had never experienced negative discrimination.<sup>154</sup> How the funneling of men toward specific nursing tasks is interpreted may be more reflective of individual feelings about whether

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<sup>150</sup> Meadus and Twomey, "Men Student Nurses," 274.

<sup>151</sup> Orla T. Muldoon and Jacqueline Reilly, "Career Choice in Nursing Students: Gender Constructs as Psychological Barriers," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 43, no. 1 (2003): 99.

<sup>152</sup> LaRocco, "A Grounded Theory Study," 127.

<sup>153</sup> Meadus and Twomey, "Men Student Nurses," 275.

<sup>154</sup> LaRocco, "A Grounded Theory Study," 127.

the requests, for example, to be used as “muscle” are burdensome or whether they inspire a sense of power or personal value.

The differentiation of nursing tasks and disciplines according to gender therefore rests in that paradoxical state between what is viewed as discriminatory and what is considered desirable. On the positive end, specialization may be an attractive recruitment factor for men. As described by Aaron Rochlen, Glenn Good, and Tracy Carver, men who work in fields dominated by women generally perceive the route to promotion as easier: “This view is consistent with research on the ‘glass escalator’ notion that when men enter traditionally female-concentrated jobs they tend to move into senior positions more quickly than their female counterparts.”<sup>155</sup> Not surprisingly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, men in nursing are more likely than women to be in higher-paid nursing occupations.<sup>156</sup> Higher salaries and opportunities for advancement support the belief that men retain gender privilege in female-dominated professions, despite being a numerical minority. The glass escalator notion, therefore, challenges the opinion that the segregation of nursing disciplines according to gender is a form of negative discrimination for men.

The ability of language to establish feelings of inclusion and exclusion is powerful. Numerous sources cite the almost exclusive use of the pronoun “she” in hospitals and nursing schools as a means of perpetuating stereotypes that impede the integration of men in nursing.<sup>157</sup> In addition to the absence of male pronouns, there is also a lack of male representation and imagery in nursing textbooks.<sup>158</sup> Moore and

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<sup>155</sup> Rochlen, Aaron B., Glenn E. Good, and Tracy A. Carver, “Predictors of Gender-Related Barriers, Work, and Life Satisfaction among Men in Nursing,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 10, no. 1 (2009): 45.

<sup>156</sup> Men in Nursing Occupations – Census.gov, <https://www.census.gov/people/files>, issued February 2013, accessed November 9, 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Christiana Kouta and Charis P. Kaite, “Gender Discrimination and Nursing: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Professional Nursing* 27, no. 1 (2011): 60; Brent MacWilliams, “Men in Nursing,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 113, no. 1 (2013): 41; Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse,” 79; Jay E. Roth and Christopher Lance Coleman, “Perceived and Real Barriers for Men Entering Nursing: Implications for Gender Diversity,” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 15, no. 3 (2008): 151; Sayman, “Fighting the Trauma Demons,” 11.

<sup>158</sup> MacWilliams, “Men in Nursing,” 42; Robert J. Meadus, “Men in Nursing: Barriers to Recruitment,” *Nursing Forum* 35, no. 3 (2000): 11; Smith, “Exploring the Challenges,” 267.

Dienemann proposed that a written history of nursing devoid of men's contributions infers that men in nursing are anomalies.<sup>159</sup> This perception of men in nursing as oddities is perpetuated by the use of the term "male nurse," a term universally disliked by the focus group participants in Rajacich et al.:

A lot of times too people will say, "Oh, you're a male nurse, it's like... I'm a nurse it's not like you're a female doctor or a male doctor [...]" I'll notice when people say, "oh, you're a male nurse," it's like, well yes, I'm a male that's in a nursing position (Unidentified).

...if they do call you a nurse, it's always 'male nurse' so you're not just a nurse... (Unidentified)<sup>160</sup>

While there are other studies that suggest that men in nursing did not feel hindered by the use of feminine language and representation, these authors still recommended the adoption of gender-neutral terms and equal representation of the sexes in nursing literature and education.<sup>161</sup>

### C. PRIDE

It is almost impossible to define feelings of pride for men in nursing without understanding these feelings in the context of role strain. Gender role strain has been defined as "the stress related to experience with a gender role"<sup>162</sup> and includes when a person does not meet traditional role standards. By this definition, men who work in female-dominated professions are likely to face the challenge of maintaining societal and personal expectations of masculinity. Therefore, even when a man becomes established as a nurse, he is apt to experience conflict between his choice of occupation and traditional gender role expectations.

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<sup>159</sup> Moore and Dienemann, "Job Satisfaction," 88.

<sup>160</sup> Rajacich et al., "If They Do Call You a Nurse," 77–78.

<sup>161</sup> LaRocco, "A Grounded Theory Study," 126; Smith, "Exploring the Challenges," 267.

<sup>162</sup> Gender Role Strain definition, <http://www.psychologyofmen.org/gender-role-strain/> accessed November 11, 2016.



Because women's work is traditionally valued less than men's work in terms of status and pay, men and women experience gender role strain differently. Sayman shared the response by one man who was questioned about his career choice of nursing:

Through most of his career, he worked in the strongly gendered areas of nursing, which are often composed of high concentrations of men: helicopter response, inner city trauma, and intensive care burn units. He told the researcher that he was frequently questioned about his job in relation to its perceived status: "I've been asked 'Why aren't you a doctor? Why didn't you go to medical school? Why did you *just* become a *nurse*?' I say, 'I didn't *just* become a nurse, I *chose* to become a nurse, and it's not *just* nursing.'" <sup>163</sup>

In contrast to women who enter male-dominated fields, men who move into feminized jobs are often viewed as taking a step down, as McMurry illustrated: "This is a crucial difference from the experience of women in nontraditional professions: 'My daughter, the physician,' resonates far more favorably in most people's ears than 'My son, the nurse.'" <sup>164</sup> In this regard, men and women in non-traditional employment are likely to experience different status rankings, with men in traditionally women's fields coming out with less social esteem.

Perception of sexual identity may be another source of role strain for people who work in gendered professions. Meadus and Twomey claimed: "It is assumed that men who chose nursing are gay. Despite lack of evidence for this belief, men nurses are questioned about their masculinity and often feel the necessity to justify their career choice. Such assumptions are based on patriarchal beliefs around the construction of nursing as a role suitable for women only." <sup>165</sup> The assumption is not limited to men in feminized professions. Unlike the gender differentiation in perceptions of status, perceptions of sexual identity in non-traditional employment are not gender-specific, as

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<sup>163</sup> Sayman, "Fighting the Trauma Demons," 15.

<sup>164</sup> Timothy B. McMurry, "The Image of Male Nurses and Nursing Leadership Mobility," *Nursing Forum* 46, no. 1 (2011): 26.

<sup>165</sup> Meadus and Twomey, "Men Student Nurses," 270.

women working in non-traditional fields such as firefighting are often presumed to be lesbians.<sup>166</sup>

Methods used to combat role strain, such as specialization and advancement, may be ways that men maintain pride within the profession. Identifying some areas of nursing as characteristically associated with women, such as obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, and family health, McMurry explains how men's masculinities influence their chosen career paths: "For many, leaving the most female-identified areas of their profession helped them resolve internal conflicts involving their masculinity. Many men may also have career ambitions of their own and take advantage of these practices whether consciously or unconsciously."<sup>167</sup> Taking advantage of promotional opportunities that lead to specialization and higher pay are a means for pushing back against the step down in status men commonly face when associated with working in traditionally female professions.

#### **D. INDOCTRINATION AND SUPPORT**

There is little evidence that the field of nursing employs indoctrination methods similar to those found in firefighting. Instead, the grooming of a nurse relies on varying levels of support. Support from inside and outside of the profession shapes the experiences of all workers, but it is particularly valuable for non-traditional workers who often find themselves under the microscope. Sayman argued how social support is essential for the success of men in nursing: "Fundamental to an understanding of how men situate their concept of masculinity, how they perceive being a nurse, interactions with peers, interactions with doctors, patient contacts, and interactions with their own circle of friends and family have critical ramifications to their recruitment and retention in the nursing profession."<sup>168</sup> To be sure, the level of satisfaction to be gained from any of these social interactions is a variable that is also dependent on the individual nurse.

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<sup>166</sup> Tessa Wright, "Lesbian Firefighters," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12, no. 3 (2008): 106.

<sup>167</sup> McMurry, "The Image of Male Nurses," 25.

<sup>168</sup> Sayman, "Fighting the Trauma Demons," 10.

Not including family members or close friends who are nurses, nursing school is the first qualitative exposure that many nursing students will have to the profession. Whether ultimately obstructive or not, disparate conditions exist between men and women in nursing education as reported by nursing students in Smith's study: "They cited lack of locker facilities, few or no male nurses in clinical settings, no male faculty, and the exclusive use of women in textbooks as evidence of gender issues in their experiences."<sup>169</sup> However, the students claimed not to feel hindered by these discrepancies, having not only reasoned that these conditions were to be expected, but that they were relatively small issues in the grand scheme of their nursing success.<sup>170</sup>

The choice of whether to downplay gender issues as marginal realities of the profession appears directly related to overall student satisfaction with the nursing education experience. This choice reflects the ability to view and accept marginal realities as an alternative framework that maintains some value. It is notable that in the studies where the criterion samples were from the northeastern United States, nursing students expressed fewer instances of discrimination.<sup>171</sup> LaRocco suggested that the diversity and liberal views of the region may yield nursing experiences that are quite different from those in other areas.<sup>172</sup>

Addressing the argument that same-sex role models would benefit people in non-traditional employment, none of the nurses in LaRocco's study found the lack of male faculty in nursing school was an impediment and instead emphasized the positive role that their classmates played in successfully completing their programs.<sup>173</sup> However, it is still widely believed that peer-support and mentor programs will benefit nontraditional students.<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, LaRocco recommended that nursing schools must remain on

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<sup>169</sup> Smith, "Exploring the Challenges," 267.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> The participants in LaRocco's study were from the greater Boston area while Smith's sample was from an undisclosed 2-year college in the Northeast. Sayman's participants represented the Midwestern United States.

<sup>172</sup> LaRocco, "A Grounded Theory Study," 128.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, "Exploring the Challenges," 268.

guard for gender bias: “Although the men did not indicate that there was any discrimination during their student experience, nursing schools should continue to recognize the potential for discriminatory behavior on the part of the faculty and strive to prevent it.”<sup>175</sup>

After leaving nursing school, the new nurse transitioning into the field will establish working relationships with doctors and fellow nurses in offices and clinical settings. While Equal Employment Opportunity bars discrimination based on protected categories including sex, the opportunities and relationships available to nurses may still be shaped by gender. Rajacich et al. explained that doctors or the medical establishment may set limitations on the work roles of men in nursing based on legal concerns: “Several participants reported that sometimes colleagues discourage men from carrying out procedures on patients with whom they have developed a rapport out of legalistic concerns, and that a double standard exists for mixed-gender treatment because of ‘. . . sensitivity to the risk of an accusation of impropriety. . .’”<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, doctors may try to avoid possible gender-related conflicts altogether, as related by one of the nurses in Sayman’s study:

... [T]he gendered nature of the occupation was a strong barrier preventing him from working in a doctor’s office, which was his goal upon graduating from nursing school: “I was really shooting to work in doctor’s offices. All of the male doctors wanted a female nurse so the female nurse could be with a female patient. The only problem is the female doctors preferred female nurses themselves.”<sup>177</sup>

On the other hand, a few of the studies indicated that men in the nursing field felt they were treated better by physicians than their female colleagues were.<sup>178</sup>

Relationships with peers are an important part of the socialization process in any workspace. All of the participants in LaRocco’s study expressed that they had no conflict

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<sup>175</sup> LaRocco, “A Grounded Theory Study,” 128.

<sup>176</sup> Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse,” 76.

<sup>177</sup> Sayman, “Fighting the Trauma Demons,” 15.

<sup>178</sup> Evans and Frank, “Contradictions and Tensions,” 283; LaRocco, “A Grounded Theory Study,” 126.

with peers and that they felt they were viewed positively.<sup>179</sup> In fact, McMurry discussed how women extended themselves to help men who were interested in nursing: “It appears that women are generally eager to see men enter ‘their’ occupations. Indeed, several male nurses noted that their female colleagues had facilitated their careers in various ways, including mentorship in college.”<sup>180</sup>

However, socialization between men and women nurses will likely be limited when men choose to distance themselves from women colleagues in order to maintain masculine status and avoid sexual tension.<sup>181</sup> In this regard, Evans and Frank found that the gendered workspace heightened male bonding: “In preference to socializing with women colleagues, the men nurses in this research sought out other men nurses for reasons such as that they shared common interests; experienced similar hardships, shared physical space such as locker rooms, and were an important sources of support for each other in what was sometimes characterized as a hostile environment.”<sup>182</sup>

Despite instances where men were urged to consider other careers in health care, many men in nursing singled out family and friends as supportive of their career choice.<sup>183</sup> Family and friends in the nursing profession have been described as a factor influencing many men’s decisions to enter the field of nursing:

The most commonly discussed way in which men entered the field of nursing was through family encouragement and/or having members of their families or friends who were in the health professions. Knowing significant others in nursing and related fields increased men’s knowledge of nursing, and they may have made nursing a more desirable career option.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> LaRocco, “A Grounded Theory Study,” 127.

<sup>180</sup> McMurry, “The Image of Male Nurses,” 26.

<sup>181</sup> Evans and Frank, “Contradictions and Tensions,” 285.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> LaRocco, “A Grounded Theory Study,” 125.

<sup>184</sup> Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse,” 73.

Whether serving as an inspiration to joining the profession or offering encouragement and approval in terms of career choice after the fact, the role of family and friends in facilitating the process of becoming a nurse cannot be dismissed.

## **E. TRADITION—CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEN TO NURSING**

Despite the reformation of nursing following the 19<sup>th</sup> century efforts by Florence Nightingale, the contributions of men to nursing span centuries. Historical records date the provision of nursing care by men as far back as the monastic movement.<sup>185</sup> In the evolution of nursing outlined by Timothy McMurry, religious orders were instrumental in defining nursing as a career for men through the Middle Ages.<sup>186</sup> During the Civil War, Walt Whitman gained the respect of battlefield doctors as he nursed injured troops at Fredericksburg, Virginia.<sup>187</sup> Nurse anesthetist Edward L.T. Lyon became the first man to serve in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps when the Corps was opened to men in 1955.<sup>188</sup> The value and expertise of the role that men have made in nursing injured troops was expressed by Edward J. Halloran in his call to facilitate transitional opportunities from military medic to nurse.<sup>189</sup>

Whereas this list is only a brief sample of the many contributions made by men to nursing, it is evidence that there is a long, albeit under-emphasized, history of men in nursing. Tradition, however, does not restrict the field of nursing from expanding its job description to emphasize skills that may appeal to a more diverse population to address the increasing demand for nurses.

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<sup>185</sup> Joan Evans, "Men Nurses: A Feminist and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 47, no. 3 (2003): 322.

<sup>186</sup> McMurry, "The Image of Male Nurses," 23.

<sup>187</sup> Walt Whitman—American Association for the History of Nursing, accessed November 16, 2016, <https://www.aahn.org/gravesites/whitman.html>.

<sup>188</sup> "Men in a Female Profession," accessed January 19, 2017, <https://sites.google.com/site/meninafemaleprofession/home/edward-l-t-lyons>.

<sup>189</sup> Edward J. Halloran, "Men, Medics, and Nursing," *American Journal of Nursing* 109, no. 6 (2009): 11.

## **F. MEN IN NURSING SUMMARY**

The analysis of men in nursing under the subcategories of entitlement, belonging, pride, social relations, and tradition reveals where the impediments to men in nursing are most pronounced and differs in many ways from the impediments faced by women in firefighting. Because of these differences, the mechanisms chosen to challenge the impediments to gender integration for men in nursing are not equally effective in the case of women in firefighting. Personal and societal expectations associated with gender roles appear to impact the integration of men to nursing more significantly than organizational constructs do. In firefighting, on the other hand, opportunities for gender integration are largely impacted by organizational limitations of supply and demand, and not simply by personal or societal expectations of gender roles. This comparative case study identifies these differences and accentuates the complexities of the impediments in each subcategory.

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## **V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

A comparison between the non-traditional work experiences of women in firefighting and men in nursing reveals organizational and societal impediments to gender integration in the workforce. There are some commonalities among the impediments faced by both populations. However, the differences are most revealing of the challenges to gender integration in each case. Notably, these differences highlight challenges that are often beyond the scope of a simple organizational fix.

### **A. ENTITLEMENT COMPARISON**

The rate of demographic change among employees in a profession is dependent on the availability of job openings proportionate to the overall workforce population. For occupations with low rates of attrition such as firefighting, diversification of the workforce will naturally be limited unlike the demand for nurses which creates room for more rapid diversification of the profession. In addition, high competition for the limited number of jobs demands a selection process to determine who is deserving of the few positions available. In the case of firefighting, testing procedures are established to identify those applicants who are best suited for the job. Physical testing requirements have most often been scrutinized for disparate impact on women firefighter candidates. Barring a quota system, the population demographic that is eligible for hire should proportionally reflect the demographic that best meets the established requirements. Despite potential backlash, effective targeted recruitment and specialized training programs should increase the number of women applicants who meet the established requirements. However, due to the overall low rate of hire, the percentage increase of women will remain minimal. Unless fire service agencies experience high rates of attrition coupled with increased staffing, an accelerated rate of diversification is highly improbable.

Job availability directly impacts workplace diversity. Many large municipalities do not face a firefighter shortage. Historically, in New York City and Toronto, the large number of firefighter applicants coupled with the low number of positions available

results in great competition for the limited number of firefighter vacancies. The FDNY currently has an operations workforce of approximately 10,600 firefighters and fire officers.<sup>190</sup> According to Sarah Dorsey, who reported in New York's civil service newspaper *The Chief Leader* on October 6, 2012, the FDNY typically hires approximately 600 firefighters per calendar year. Even if the City of New York were to hire only women firefighters for one calendar year, the total number of women firefighters would amount to just 6 percent of the entire fire operations workforce. Considering that on average many fewer women than men apply for firefighting jobs, the realistic expected increase in women firefighters is much less. Without a significant turnover or increased hiring, the lack of significant demand does not allow for rapid change.

Unlike firefighting, the nursing shortage provides greater opportunities for employment and an increasing number of men have slowly been filling available spots. Shortages have often opened the door for non-traditional workers in other fields. David Burrelli attributed the increased recruitment of women in the U.S. Armed Forces to the inability to find enough qualified men in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>191</sup> Carreiras identified similar circumstances propelling the role of women in the armed forces of the former Soviet Union:

As happened during the First World War, the presence of women was particularly significant in the armed forces of the Soviet Union. Due to the lack of male manpower and the prolongation of the conflict, more than 1 million women were recruited to serve in all kinds of functions, including infantry, armored cars, artillery, and anti-aircraft defense.<sup>192</sup>

Similarly, nursing shortages demand that the profession recruit a non-traditional workforce to meet its needs.

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<sup>190</sup> FDNY Strategic Plan 2015–2017: 39, accessed January 26, 2017, [http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/pdf/ofc/FDNY\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2015\\_2017.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/pdf/ofc/FDNY_strategic_plan_2015_2017.pdf).

<sup>191</sup> David F. Burrelli, *Women in the Armed Forces* (CRS Report No. 92008) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1998), 1, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=718051>.

<sup>192</sup> Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 9.

Targeted recruitment in urban firefighting is a strategy for diversifying a homogenous work force. Not unlike strategies that attempt to re-invent the image of nursing as a profession for men, targeted recruitment of women to firefighting promotes images of women firefighters and emphasizes benefits presumed to be attractive to women, such as flexible scheduling and the rewards of community service. However, unlike nursing, targeted recruitment in firefighting often includes gender-specific preparation programs for the written and/or physical exams. While progressives consider these programs as a means for leveling an uneven playing field, traditionalists view the programs as special treatment which gives the target group an unfair advantage. The backlash not only discourages some women from participating in targeted recruitment programs out of the fear of being labeled as ‘needing extra help,’ but it has also served to influence some departments to stop offering gender-specific programs.<sup>193</sup>

Unlike traditional recruitment, targeted recruitment rebrands nursing by emphasizing characteristics that are believed to appeal to a target group. Targeted recruitment of men to nursing includes promoting the contributions of men in nursing, the value of masculine skill sets, and the opportunities for advancement. The efforts seem to be paying off. Increased enrollment of men in nursing schools has followed the use of targeted recruitment strategies.<sup>194</sup> After the completion of nursing school, there is a trend for men in nursing to move into higher salaried, nursing specializations.

Firefighting is equated with physical and psychological strength. Beliefs that women have neither the physical nor mental strength to be a firefighter are commonly argued as reasons why women do not belong in firefighting.<sup>195</sup> Whereas there is no measure for caregiving in order to become a nurse, physical ability is tested in order to become a firefighter. Historically, firefighter physical testing has been subject to lawsuits resulting in court mandates that require fire departments to remedy their hiring procedures much to the disdain of many veteran firefighters. When hiring procedures are scrutinized by policy makers, traditional job requirements are questioned in the debate

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<sup>193</sup> Hulett et al., *A National Report Card*, 6.

<sup>194</sup> Meyers, “Real Men,” 20.

<sup>195</sup> Pacholok, *Into the Fire*, 39.

over whether current physical and mental qualifications for firefighter accurately reflect the evolving duties of the profession. Even when municipalities change job qualifications due to court rulings, women firefighters hired as a result of such modifications often carry the stigma associated with not having passed the “real” test.

As much as firefighting is equated with physical prowess, nurses are esteemed for their caregiving aptitude. The stereotype that men are not as caring as women suggests that men are not as qualified as women to be nurses. The effort to reframe caring as a human quality, as opposed to one that is gender-specific, challenges this stereotype. Ironically, firefighting provides an example of how masculinity and caregiving can co-exist, as Braedley described:

This work in which firefighters were engaged was clearly a kind of care provision. Firefighters came to the aid of wide variety of people who needed assistance related to their health concerns. Usually firefighters dealt with only the most immediate issues pertaining to their situation. They resuscitated, revived, assessed, dislodged, bandaged, transported and calmed. Their care was a systemic response to an emergency call for assistance. The assistance was often required due to the inaccessibility or unavailability of more appropriate supports for what were often long-term conditions.<sup>196</sup>

Recasting the image of firefighters as caregivers helps to chip away at societal impressions of caring as a feminine attribute. I have worked with a number of male firefighters who have entered nursing as a second career. Further research would be warranted to explore whether or not the benefits of shiftwork and a background in emergency medical response promote the path from firefighting to nursing.

## **B. BELONGING COMPARISON**

The establishment of trust, the use of gender-specific language, and the provision of equal workspace accommodation each contribute to individual sense of belonging in the gendered work environments of firefighting and nursing.

Trust is built by mastering the gendered aptitudes that define each profession. The primacy of trust helps to explain why the fire service is defined as a family, as a

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<sup>196</sup> Braedley, “Emergencies of Care,” 199.

firefighter is expected to go to any length to help his brother or sister. For women firefighters, trust is defined by the relationship between peers and is established by displaying the physical and mental fortitude that firefighting demands.

Women firefighters interviewed by Boggs expressed concerns that male firefighters did not trust their firefighting abilities and would not support them.<sup>197</sup> Questions of trust explain why many women firefighters have felt themselves under the microscope where their firefighting abilities are closely scrutinized. The disparagement of women firefighter's abilities is likely to lead to the sentiment that the woman is not fit to be a firefighter which, in turn, jeopardizes her sense of belonging in the profession.

For men in nursing, trust is contingent on the perception of proper caregiving, usually by the client. Issues of trust center on overcoming suspicions about caring behaviors. Men in nursing are more wary than women nurses about the perception of inappropriate touch or seduction. Client refusal and the difficulty of certain clinical rotations for men in nursing are based in feelings of discomfort and mistrust. While some men expressed that the situation seemed unfair due to their training and qualifications, many did not take offense to client refusals.<sup>198</sup> The refusals did not appear to affect overall feelings of belonging in the profession.

Similar to challenges in establishing trust, the use of gender-specific language is commonly found in gendered workspaces. Unlike the word "nurse," which only has one form, firefighters may be distinguished as firemen or firewomen. "Firemen" and the "brotherhood" are words most commonly used to refer to the members and social structure of firefighting in general. The prevalent use of masculine terms, coupled with the fact that there are so few women firefighters, reinforces the anomalousness of women in firefighting. Unlike men in nursing, however, women in firefighting generally do not take exception to the qualification of the phrase "women firefighters." In fact, the phrase "woman firefighter" brings visibility to women in the profession as opposed to the term "fireman," which is avoided by prominent women firefighter organizations. Women

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<sup>197</sup> Boggs, "Equal Employment Opportunity," 134.

<sup>198</sup> Smith, "Exploring the Challenges," 267.

firefighter groups often promote the use of gender-specification in their organizational titles. United Women Firefighters, Fire Service Women of Ontario, and Fire Service Women of New York State are just a few examples of how women in firefighting deliberately emphasize their gender.

The prevalent use of the pronoun “she” along with the lack of male representation in nursing, implies that men in nursing are anomalies. This outlier status is further reinforced with the use of the term “male nurse” as opposed to simply using the term “nurse” when referring to a man in nursing. Many of the previously referenced studies indicate that the phrase “male nurse” is largely disliked by men in nursing.<sup>199</sup>

Finally, the absence of equal workspace accommodation is another condition that has been frequently experienced by both women in firefighting and men in nursing. While the deficiency of locker facilities has been cited as a disparity experienced by some male nursing students,<sup>200</sup> workplace accommodation needs are much more striking for women firefighters. Not only are separate shower and changing facilities still lacking in many fire departments, but unlike men in nursing, women firefighters have greater difficulty in obtaining proper fitting gear and often need to compensate when mastering effective techniques for using tools that are designed to male specifications.

Whether these disparities are significant enough to inhibit gender integration will vary based on individual expectations upon entering a gendered workforce and whether these discrepancies are worth fighting over in the overall goal of employment satisfaction. Regardless, unlike the establishment of trust, the use of gender-exclusive language and unequal workspace accommodations are issues that are within the scope of fire service organizations to remedy. While taking these steps towards inclusivity may do little to increase women’s overall recruitment to firefighting, they are likely to increase the sense of belonging and the retention of incumbent women firefighters.

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<sup>199</sup> Rajacich et al., “If They Do Call You a Nurse,” 78.

<sup>200</sup> Smith, “Exploring the Challenges,” 267.

### **C. PRIDE COMPARISON**

Pride is an attribute reflecting the sense of identity that one has with their trade. While gender role strain is identified as an impediment for men in nursing, women firefighters do not suffer from the social status depreciation experienced by men in feminized professions. Sense of pride among women firefighters is prevalent. The honor of being one of a small percentage of women serving in a noble profession reinforces a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction. Unfortunately, this strong sense of pride may also come at the detriment of other women firefighters who are perceived to be less capable. Regardless, because pride in profession is a strong motivator for many women firefighters, recruitment initiatives that emphasize women's exceptionalism may be more successful at attracting qualified women to firefighting than efforts that minimize traits traditionally viewed as masculine. Aggressive marketing strategies may include targeting women in emergency medical services, women in the military, women athletes, and women in non-traditional employment by appealing to those who "have the right stuff" to be a firefighter. Further research would be necessary to determine the impact of aggressive recruitment initiatives that focus on women's exceptionalism and whether the focus on quality over quantity helps or hinders women's recruitment and integration efforts.

Neither men in nursing nor women firefighters meet the traditional gender role standards for their respective professions. However, the stress related to gender role experiences vary between the two groups. Women do not generally suffer from lower status rankings by working in masculine professions. Because such a small percentage of women successfully navigate the selection process and become firefighters, those who do succeed maintain a great deal of pride in their accomplishment. Role strain affects women firefighters when they feel they need to prove that their gender as a category is capable of meeting the demands of firefighting. Given that women are a small minority of most firefighting workforces, many of their firefighting peers distinguish women firefighters between those whom they consider to be capable firefighters and those who are not. As a consequence, some women firefighters also make a point of distinguishing themselves from other women in order to defend their own merit. Ultimately, the attempt

to prove individual merit at the expense of others supports the belief that only exceptional women can be good firefighters.<sup>201</sup>

Men doing what is traditionally considered women's work are likely to experience a lower status ranking than men in male-dominant professions.<sup>202</sup> Discouragement from those who do not feel that men should be nurses reflects perceptions that a man in nursing is not living up to his full potential. Therefore, the challenge of maintaining expectations of masculinity is a stressor for men in nursing that is rooted in societal expectations about what it means to be a man. As a response, men in nursing are more likely to leave feminized areas of the profession for specialized nursing fields and career advancement. These opportunities typically provide improved social status and higher salaries which may help to resolve personal conflicts that arise from gender role strain.

It is not unusual for men and women who work in nontraditional fields to have their sexual identity questioned. While there is a presumption that many women in nontraditional work including firefighting are lesbians, the stereotype also exists that women join the fire service for the primary purpose of meeting male firefighters.<sup>203</sup> Perceptions of sexual identity are not necessarily likely to deter women from entering the fire service, however these perceptions may impact how a woman firefighter is received and treated by her peers. Alternatively, perceptions that men in nursing are gay create challenges for the recruitment and retention of men in the profession when men are questioned about their masculinity and choice of profession.

#### **D. INDOCTRINATION COMPARISON**

Indoctrination is the rite of passage to becoming a firefighter and is not directly comparable to the process of becoming a nurse. However, the presence of mentorship and the forms social interactions take shape individual development in both professions.

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<sup>201</sup> Perrott, "Beyond 'Token' Firefighters."

<sup>202</sup> Rochlen, Good, and Carver, "Predictors of Gender-Related Barriers," 45.

<sup>203</sup> Wright, "Lesbian Firefighters," 107.



The company officer is not solely responsible for the grooming and acceptance of the woman firefighter. The shaping of a firefighter must come from ranks, with the senior firefighter at the helm. As a newcomer, a firefighter is molded by senior firefighters to learn the trade and preserve traditions. As with any junior firefighter, the mentoring relationship between the senior firefighter and a young woman firefighter will play a tremendous role in the level of acceptance and respect that she is afforded by her fellow firefighters. In effect, the senior firefighter is an essential mentor, particularly for nontraditional firefighters who may have had little exposure to the culture of firefighting and firehouse life.

In most cases, the senior firefighter is male due to the limited number of women in the fire service. While the senior man is instrumental in teaching all young firefighter the essentials of firefighting, the ability to intervene in issues related specifically to gender is uncommon territory. Depending on levels of trust, the degree of comfort and expertise in addressing the gender-related issues may be difficult for the woman firefighter, the senior man, or both. With so few women, it is therefore not uncommon for women firefighters to seek guidance on issues that are perceived to be gender-related from other women firefighters or women firefighter organizations. More often than not, women firefighters find that they are not alone in their experiences.

Although it is not generally viewed as an impediment, men in nursing cite the lack of mentorship opportunities as a factor that should be remedied.<sup>204</sup> In addition to the support afforded by women nurses and fellow students, formal mentorship would provide nursing students with opportunities to learn from men in nursing school and in clinical settings. Male mentors can offer guidance on the use of touch and how to navigate difficult clinical rotations and client refusal. Outside of the medical establishment, support by family and friends has also proved to be instrumental to the success of men in nursing.

One of the challenges non-traditional employees encounter in a gendered workforce is learning how to navigate the space of social interaction. Actions and

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<sup>204</sup> Smith, "Exploring the Challenges," 268.

behavior that are seemingly innocuous among members of the same sex may cross boundaries of acceptability in mixed groups. This is symptomatic of gender relations in general. In firefighting, part of the initiation process customarily includes pranks and jokes. Participation in firehouse pranks are a means for building resiliency and establishing a sense of belonging with the group. These customs may also be a source of tension. Fears of disciplinary action may inhibit male firefighters from performing initiation pranks on women firefighters. Furthermore, the extent to which a firefighter, male or female, participates in a given social interaction with peers sends a message about the acceptability of the behavior. This social interaction may become problematic if the behavior crosses the line of personal acceptability.

For behavior that borders on lines of acceptability, women firefighters may find themselves trying to navigate the space between becoming an accepted part of the in-group and establishing boundaries to maintain professional integrity. The navigation of this space may be best advised by women firefighter mentors, but in many departments the number of women firefighters is too few to afford this service. In fire service agencies where women's mentorship is not available, information on professional women firefighter organizations is a resource that fire departments could consult and make available for their women firefighters.

Like women firefighters, men in nursing are subject to tensions during social interactions with peers. According to the interviews conducted by Evans and Frank, men in nursing felt restricted from participating in sexually-themed practical jokes unlike the women nurses who they saw as having few limitations.<sup>205</sup> Evans and Frank attributed the restraints that men felt to stereotypes about male and female sexual aggression. In addition, they proposed that men in nursing choose to limit their social interaction with women nurses to avoid accusations of sexual harassment and tensions whether in the workplace or at work-sanctioned events.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Evans and Frank, "Contradictions and Tensions," 286.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

## **E. TRADITION COMPARISON**

Fire service tradition is long and storied and, in many ways, resistant to change. The tradition is also largely a story of men. By comparison, the tradition of nursing is often thought of as being a story of women. However, unlike firefighting where women have only been a part of the career service for a relatively short time, men have a history in nursing which can be highlighted in efforts to de-feminize the profession by relating a history of nursing that includes both men and women.

In her *Fire Engineering* commentary in April 2010, Mary Hauprich wrote: “The issue, we know, doesn’t lie solely in the argument that women are incapable of performing the demanding duties of firefighting. That myth is continually being disproven by a small but growing number of firefighting professionals in our firehouses today. The issue, we must admit, lies also in the demise of ‘tradition.’” Hauprich suggested that tradition is what ultimately hinders the positive integration of women firefighters. However, with tradition as such a strong force in the fire service, the task is to find means by which women and the tradition of the fire service are able to co-exist. For women in firefighting, who have a short history in the profession, the choice for many may seem either to uphold the less-inclusive traditions of fire service, or fight to change the tradition at the risk of further exclusion. However, an additional option exists which is to celebrate the tradition of fire service and fire service culture and build upon its richness by adding new traditions that complement the old. Instead of deconstructing the brotherhood of firefighting, the fire service can celebrate the brotherhood by embracing the sisterhood into its family.

With only a 40-year history in career fire service, women firefighters do not have the historic past of men in nursing. Firefighting has exclusively been men’s work until relatively recently. In addition, firefighting prides itself on rich history and tradition which it vigorously protects. For newcomers, acceptance of tradition becomes a means for establishing group membership. However, acclimating to fire service culture may prove difficult for women who have not historically been a part of the history and tradition of fire service. Challenging traditions are possible with critical mass, as Carreiras explained: “The concentration of large numbers of women in segregated labor

markets creates a new political situation in the workplace, opening a potential space for the articulation and mobilization of social interests that may challenge the established gender order.”<sup>207</sup> However, due to the slow rate of change in fire service, critical mass is not likely to occur anytime soon. Without the long history or critical mass of women in fire service, the reshaping of fire service tradition and culture will be a slow process.

Despite a long history of men in nursing, the contributions of men to nursing faded in the gender shift of nursing to a woman’s profession. The gender shift occurred in both civil and military domains and further feminized the profession. However, the fact that men served as nurses with honor and distinction over the course of history is grounds for challenging traditional presumptions that men are not suited for the profession. The contributions of men to nursing exist. Promoting the history of men in nursing will help to reshape traditional views about nursing as a woman’s profession and about the role of men as caregivers.

## **F. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The goal of this comparative case study has been to analyze the impediments to gender integration in career fire service by considering how similar impediments impact men in nursing and whether the challenges to gender integration are symptomatic of institutions or of society in general. Although women firefighters face some of the same categorical impediments that men in nursing encounter, the specifics of the impediments often differ based on gender role expectations. Gender integration policies are best at addressing institutionalized impediments. There is no question that institutionalized impediments should be corrected for the benefit of the entire workforce. However, impediments which are grounded in societal expectations of gender roles are not easily remedied by gender integration policies. In addition, genderless factors such as the availability of jobs have considerable impact on the rate of diversification of any workforce.

A better understanding of the roles that various impediments to gender integration play is necessary in the fire service commitment to greater workplace diversity. While

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<sup>207</sup> Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, 29–30.

every effort must be taken to ensure equal employment opportunity for all, recruitment and retention strategies in fire service have often failed to make marked change. The limited availability of jobs in the fire service, with the corresponding slow rate of personnel change, is a significant factor that impedes not just gender integration, but diversification of the workforce in general. The broad factors that limit workforce change must be considered to establish reasonable goals for improved gender integration of fire service.

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